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TOWARD THE STRAIT GATE;

OR,

PARISH CHRISTIANITY

FOR THE UNCONVERTED.

BY
REV. E. F. BURR, D. D.,

AUTHOR OF "ECCE CŒLUM," "PATER MUNDI," "AD FIDEM," ETC.; AND LECTURER ON THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCES OF RELIGION IN AMHERST COLLEGE.

"Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder Wicket Gate?"

"Strive to enter in at the Strait Gate."

BOSTON:
LOCKWOOD, BROOKS, AND COMPANY,
381 WASHINGTON STREET.
1875.

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PREFACE.

THE present volume is the natural successor to *Ad Fidem*. It views the reader as having been brought to accept the Bible as a Divine message, and seeks to conduct him from this point, step by step, to a Scriptural conversion.

There are two ways of doing this. One assumes the man to be quite ignorant of the leading Bible-truths looking toward conversion, and proceeds to set them forth in their proper logical order as one would teach the principles of a science to a beginner — carefully keeping from using any truth till it has been formally expounded in its place. The other assumes a general acquaintance with the Bible which is intellectually accepted ; and so, while presenting the various topics in their natural order, very much as is done by the other method, does not hesitate to use at any point whatever commonly received truth may there seem of service.

The latter way is the one used in this work. It has the advantage of being conformed to the

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actual state of most unconverted persons in our parishes. They are far from being like one beginning for the first time to study a science. They not only accept the Bible as true, but they are also familiar with the main points of its teaching. The immortality of the soul, a future state of rewards and punishments, the general nature of the Divine law, the guilt and condemnation of men, a way of pardon through Christ, a new character and life by Divine power — all such truths they have read and heard about, almost daily, from childhood, and admit quite as distinctly as they do the authority of the Bible itself. They need to have them emphasized, made vivid by illustrations, brought to bear on the mind in their proper order and relations — but they do *not* need to have them *made known.* To deal with such persons as if they were bare of all Scriptural knowledge, is to throw a certain air of unreality and misapplication over the whole dealing. It also unnecessarily narrows at any given point the range for cogent expostulation. The work to be done is chiefly one of *persuading* — of persuading men to a vastly important and vastly resisted step — and for doing this, one can hardly have too wide scope for argument and appeal.

LYME, CONN.

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ATTEND.

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PARISH CHRISTIANITY.

I.

ATTEND.

OUR first business with truth is to *know* it as such.

We are ever learning. Not a day passes without some new fact or principle dawning upon us. Perhaps it is a fact of science, or a fact of history, or a principle of religion. It is a novelty — we never saw it before. It looks to us as fresh as though it had just been created, or fished up all dripping with crystal from the bottom of the sea where it has been silently and invisibly lying ever since the sea was. Very likely it has been bandied about among men for thousands of years — buffeted and embraced, enthroned and dethroned, battled and diplomatized, from generation to generation in many countries and languages — and yet it seems to our discovering eyes a freshly made Adam; his dewy cheek eloquent with the

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pure blood just making its first marvelous circuit, and his liquid eye beaming soft astonishment on a world almost as new as himself.

And now that the stranger truth has at last come fairly into our possession, and we understand its meaning and reality — what shall we do with it? Here it is (the scientific truth, the business truth, the truth historic, or the truth religious) standing out in the bold relief of a first sight — tell us what we shall do with it. "Use it, of course: and if no opportunity for doing so exists just now, hold the truth fast till an opportunity shall come. Fix it in your memory, lay it up against the time of need in some secure and convenient nook of your mind, make sure of it by the chains and rivets of associated thought, and so have it all ready to turn to account when circumstances call for it." Good counsel in the main. Still no small limitation needs to be made. All truth cannot be used. There are hurtful truths — low, corrupting truths, as well as such as are high, pure, and salutary. There are facts, as really such as any rocks that you see, which it were better not to know, or which, unfortunately having known, you had better forget as soon as possible. Hastily put them away from your

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thoughts — they are so much infection. Burn them out from the tablets of your memory as soon and as thoroughly as you can — they are so much eating poison, and have eaten out to a mere echoing shell the promising heart of many a man. Parents well know that they have almost as much occasion to guard their children against certain kinds of knowledge as they have to secure to them certain other kinds — "lest they become wise to do evil and to do good have no knowledge."

Besides truths which are positively harmful, there are others of so small or doubtful value that it is not worth our while to be at much pains to keep them in the memory. I might spend this whole day in laying down sentence after sentence before you, each of which you would grant to be true and yet would feel to be such trifling truth as deserves neither the hearing nor the speaking. The world is full of books which are true enough, but whose truths are not worth the printing; much less the time and pains needed to fix them firmly in the memory. As the eye and the hand do not easily keep their hold of very small objects, so, in general, no truths so easily escape the grasp of the memory as those trifling ones which

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can hardly be seen. A wise man who has matters of plain moment enough to occupy him, will let these dwarfish and microscopic truths take their chance of being remembered. He cannot afford, with so many great interests on his hands, to guard a pin as if it were a principality. If it can shift for itself, and so manage to get preserved, very well: but if not, he cannot embark a great capital of time and pains in the enterprise of securing a small benefit.

For there are such things as *great* truths claiming his attention. Facts and principles, true and solid as the world and vastly greater, have come to his knowledge; and scarcely any degree of pains would be misplaced in the effort to domesticate them in the mind. Should he labor for this till he is weary, till he is exhausted, till he outdoes all other laborers and seems almost himself a Providence, still so important are the truths of which I speak, so great and constant is the use to which they may be put, so certain is it that great care will preserve them influentially to the mind and that nothing short of it will, that he is warranted in all this outlay. I speak of *all the fundamental religious truths;* but especially of certain very elementary ones, a sense of which

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lies at the foundation of religion, and is necessary to secure even a suitable attention to the subject. Our mortality as bodies; our immortality as souls; the supreme importance of religion; our exposure as moral beings to a great crowd of dangers; our accountability to a Divine Being — these things cannot have it said of them that the sooner they are forgotten the better. Nor can any say that the use of these truths is so doubtful or so slight that very considerable pains to keep them before the mind as living pictures and forces cannot be justified. One could hardly do too much for this purpose. At all expense hold fast the slippery necessities. With reverential but firm hand make prisoners of the angels who have come to see you. Set sleepless guards at every gate of your mind lest they escape. Insist steadily on their going with you wherever you go, and on their staying with you wherever you stay. Never suffer them, or at least their shadows, out of your sight. At last turn your prisoners into freely abiding and naturalized citizens, by your wise devotion and sacred policy, and let your fortress be their home. Yet watch and stand to your arms still, lest, from without, a subtle world, or a subtler Satan, slyly undo your

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gates and rob you of your new friends. Whatever pains you take for this will not be wasted. You will be repaid more than a thousand fold.

Consider our *mortality*. All religions make so great use of this grave fact in their dealings with men — far more than is made in any other quarter — that it well deserves to be called a religious truth. Now this truth, my friend, is one which neither you nor I nor any other person can have any doubt about. Name it, and all our heads at once sink upon our bosoms. Some of us would be glad to deny it if we could — oh, that there were such room for doubt and dispute on this matter as on many others which are likely enough but still not quite as certain as the mathematics — but, as it is, there is nothing to be said, not the shadow of a point on which by any ingenuity we can manage to hang an objection however small. We are dying beings. The youngest and strongest of us, with the oldest and weakest, are all going one way — the way to the grave. We shall see a few more suns rise and set, perhaps a few more seasons come and go, and then will come a day when we shall be missing from the places where men have been wont to see us. We are not in the field, nor

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in the workshop, nor in the store, nor in the neighbor's dwelling — no, not even in our own dwelling. Let him who seeks us go from room to room till the house is done, and not a glimpse will he get of us, not a well-known foot-fall or tone will betray our presence anywhere. No, friend, go and search a very different house, the house appointed for all the living. Go to the parish church-yard and under a little mound of earth you will find him you seek — all cold and voiceless, and yet able to say to you, "What I am now that you must be, prepare for death and follow me."

As sure a fact as our mortality is, it is not one that easily lives in our memories. When the mind is turned to it, we know it as a thing not to be disputed: having examples and dangers of death thickly about us, the unpleasant idea is often suggested. But it is a flying visitor — comes and is away again without folding its wings. So it is with most people; and, on trial, they find it hard to have it otherwise. Of course, we cannot consciously keep death always before our mind, amid the great variety of business and cares which must occupy our attention. But there is such a thing as an *uncon-*

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scious presence of an idea — a presence shaping our conduct every moment though we are not distinctly aware of the fact. When we have lost a friend our whole lives thenceforth proceed under an assumption of his absence from the sphere in which we move ; though, after some years have passed, we are seldom conscious of having a distinct picture of his death before us. We set out on a journey, and through its whole course, however long it may be, our steps are governed by a certain original plan of travel, though, most of the time, our minds are fully occupied with the various scenes through which we are passing and make no distinct account of that plan. So we may unconsciously have an abiding sense that we are dying beings. And it is this abiding sense, consciously or unconsciously held, of which I speak as something seldom possessed, and to be gained only with difficulty. However one may choose to explain it, the fact is certain that there is a mighty and almost irresistible tendency in most men to lose sense of their exposure to death at any moment. We grasp and resolve to keep it, having become convinced that we must so number our days as to apply our hearts

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unto wisdom: when lo, we have scarcely taken a turn among our friends or our business, before our minds are emptied of their just views, and we are found living just as if we are to live here forever. God grant that this state of things may not continue!

Near our mortality, and shedding awful lights upon it, stands the majestic fact of our *immortality.* The body dies soon, the soul lives always. Amid all the changes to take place in our histories we shall never cease to be thinking, conscious beings — stretching away, away, on an unending journey. This truth is about as commonly accepted in Christian communities as is the fact of bodily death. "Yes," says our orthodoxy, and even our natural religion, "it is even so. I am not a brute, going down after a few days to lose myself in the ground, a mere senseless lump of clay; but, with these high aspirations and moral faculties and capacities of indefinite improvement fermenting within me, I am doubtless launched forth on that oceanic mystery, an eternal voyage." Since the time this idea first came to you, you have had many returns of it. People living in a land of Bibles and Christian preaching hear it knocking at

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their doors every sabbath, if not every day. But it does not enter — or, entering, it does not stay. Not one person in a hundred has an abiding sense of the fact that his true, conscious, existence will never, never end — outlasting the toughest empires; outlasting Hegiras and Christian Eras and historic stretches of every name; outlasting even the long drawn periods of Geology and those which unwind their misty and almost incredible coils up amid the cold glitter of nebular astronomy. Is not this a true charge? True sadly of *you?* And if you have tried to make the sense of your personal immortality a part of the standing furniture of your mind, you will bear me witness that you have found it no small thing you have undertaken. With what surprising ease the mind slips away from its task! In some moment of clear, perhaps terrified, vision, you resolved that you would no longer live as you had done, but would, with might and main, with watchfulness and prayerfulness, keep the fact of your deathless destiny framed and hung up conspicuously in the chambers of imagery, an ever pleading picture in behalf of a holy life; but alas, you had scarcely taken a turn among the cares and vanities of

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the outside world before the picture was gone into mist, and your horizon, instead of embracing in clear sweep the sublime fields of an endless life, narrowed down to that poor pittance of a circle which bounds to-day. In general, it is only by great and long effort that men come to have an abiding sense of their immortality. By some means, and by all means, may Heaven grant this sense to each of us!

Is not *religion the chief thing?* The culture and elevation of our spiritual natures, a high-minded following of principle and conscience, a resurrection from depths of sin to glorious hights of virtue — has anything equal claims on our interest and our efforts? I listen. From east to west, from hight to depth, there comes not from reasonable beings a single murmur of denial — especially from such as have their eyes open on the twin facts of our mortality and our immortality. Yes, religion, *true* religion, is the supreme thing for men. Down at the bottom of our hearts we all know it. Nothing that men bargain for, and pine for, and die for; nothing for sake of which men vex earth and lose heaven, is worth mentioning in view of a pure heart and a grandly righteous life. Often, very often, this

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truth comes to those of us who are familiar with Bibles and churches: but, my friend, do I err in saying that in few of us is this confessed truth thoroughly at home? It is a visitor, a guest, a very frequent guest it may be, but after all *only* a guest — staying a little while in our best rooms and then going away. Oh that this truth which visits us at intervals could be made to take up its abode with us! But, if our wishes are met we must have something more solid and costly than wishes. We must have great painstaking. The soul must gird itself, and bare its arms, and work. Perhaps you are able to give testimony on this point, and can say that, in some moment of clear vision, when you saw with fearful distinctness that all the objects pursued by men are mere dross compared with religion, you resolved that the great truth should never again be lost sight of, and set yourself to bind it to your imagination and memory with seven green withes: but, alas, you had scarcely shaken hands with your companions and your business, before your Samson was up and away as free as ever, and you were joining the rest of men in the hue and cry after bubbles as zealously as of old. So hard is the task before us. Alas! may Heaven help us

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to hold the guest which Nature seems to refuse us but which we cannot do without!

Let me tell a thoughtful man, with his eyes open on the wonders of earth and sky, that Nature has an infinite personal Author to whom he is responsible, and he will not think of saying me nay. Let me tell any man, whether thoughtful or not, that every human soul is beset with crowds of moral dangers, and he will confess, "I cannot deny what you say; it is matter of plain observation and experience. Strong evil tendencies and passions are within me. From without come temptations almost as thickly as falling leaves of autumn woods. Thousands stand ready to mislead both my doctrine and my practice. Society is cloudy with bad breath of bad lives. The whole air is poisoned by evil example — burdened with words that ought not to be spoken, and fetid with deeds that ought not to be done. Many are weak and weakening. Many stumble and fall. Many are already ruined, and many are on the way. It is *true* we are beset. I see and feel that there is a tremendous drag downward on every man who mixes with this downward-going world; and when you compare this to the mighty yet noiseless energy of gravitation, which may indeed

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be overcome but which so steadily goes to sink everything on the earth to the lowest possible point, I have not a word to say against the justice of the comparison." You assent to such words. You cannot but do it — so plain are the facts. But have you an abiding sense that not a day passes without finding and leaving you in the presence of a God to whom you must give account? Does it habitually seem to you that you are like David, hunted from cave to cave by a Saul who skirts one side of the mountain while his quarry is skirting the other — or like Xenophon with his ten thousand in their wonderful retreat through a rallied empire of enemies? By no means. You live in a too loose and indifferent sort of way. No one would suppose such light, trifling, bubble-hunting person to be laboring under a sense of heavy peril. We do not see it in your face, nor in your words, nor in your actions. And if we could come at your heart we should not see it there. The serious, collected, wary deportment of one alive to the fact of perilous surroundings, is, most of the time, quite wanting. No one need tell me that such a free and easy liver, with his smooth brow and careless ways, feels that he is being shot at by a thousand arch-

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ers. I know better. I know the signs of a fearful and cautious man too well for that. Where is his helm or shield? Where his posture of fence?

A whole family abroad! Father, mother, children, in holiday attire, walking leisurely on the street, laughing, chatting, jesting, idling hither and thither, looking in at this show window, reading that play bill, parleying at yon huckster's stall — enjoying the blessed sunshine and seeing what may be seen. Have these promenaders well dined? Do they take prudent and scanty breath? Are they carrying about with them some grand catholicon, or at least some disinfecting essences? Nothing of the sort. Surely these people have never heard, or for the time being are forgetting, that this is an infected district of the city and that every breath of the air is loaded with pestilence! How else would they appear and do as they do? So I ask myself how it can be that one who is fairly awake to the fact of dreadful moral malarias and deaths poisoning his whole atmosphere, should carry himself as carelessly as you do. You are *not* awake. What you occasionally see clearly, and perhaps loudly confess, is for the most part out of sight. Sin, Satan, temptations, errors, corrup-

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tions, responsibilities — soul breathed pestilently against by every wind that blows across this corrupt world — all are matters of knowledge, and yet a knowledge so unattended to as to be practically no knowledge at all! Awake, careless one! People circumstanced as you are have no right to live as if without enemies and dangers. *Awake*, I say: and, if you find the drowsy air of the enchanted ground too strong for you, call for help on "Him who quickeneth all things." Do it soon, or you may rue your supineness in a waking that will be all too late.

Of course there are many other truths bearing on religion which, though well known, easily slip away and are almost always out of sight. But I have called attention to these elementary ones, belonging to natural religion, because, if the mind will keep itself fairly awake to these, it will be sure to do justice to the whole subject of religion. So, let me urge you to rouse yourself to an abiding sense of the acknowledged facts that we are dying beings, that our souls will nevertheless live forever, that we are responsible for our characters and conduct to an Infinite Being, that religion is the supreme thing, and that we are in the midst of great moral dangers. Such truths

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are too great to be neglected. Do not allow them to be buried under heaps of trifles. Call them up from the horizon to which they have retreated. Drag them out of the mists which give them such vague and feeble outline. Place them just under your eyes, and turn all possible light on them. Now see how they shine! Lo, what important truths they are! 'Lay fast hold of these instructions.' Grasp them as valiant and determined men grasp the banner which foes are trying to wrest from them. Treat them as in a time of war a garrison treats the flag under which the fortress is held. Is it left in some dark corner, and only brought out now and then when some chance has called attention to it? On a flag-staff sunk deep in a stony socket and rising high in air where all can see it, behold the national emblem! And there sways out the great pictured sheet, day and night, summer and winter, saluting all winds and asserting the country in all eyes. The soldier sees it as he first goes forth in the morning. It remains in his sight all the day as he drills, and watches, and battles. And when the day closes he catches the last beam from its illuminated field, is lulled to rest by its flap and rustle, and then sees it wave and triumph in his dreams.

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There are other standards than those of war. Such are the standard truths we have just been considering. Keep them ever conspicuously unfurled in your presence. They will prepare the way of the Lord. They will bespeak your attention loudly to the matter of personal religion, and to that Divine Message that seeks to lead you to it. For, *the Mighty God, even the Lord, has spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.*

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II.

GOD SPEAKS.

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II.

GOD SPEAKS.

BEHOLD a Being, collossal beyond all fabled stature, standing on the circle of the earth and calling to its inhabitants in tones loud enough to reach every ear around the mighty convexity of its surface!

This is the *Mighty God.*

The world has its gods many. Some of them are very powerful: for they are the monarchs of the air, the forest, and the deep; the heroes of the fight; and the elements of Nature. But, powerful as they are, the best of them cannot for a moment bear comparison with Jehovah. Even where the idolater has drawn wholly on his imagination for his gods, he has failed to give us the equals of that Great Being whom the Christian worships. Mars rages in the field and Jupiter thunders from his throne like some great men whom some greater man could conquer. They are afraid, they struggle at their enterprises, they are even defeated. A whole senate

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of such gods as had the homage of old Greece and Rome could not make a moment's hesitation in the sweep of such an arm as belongs to the God of the Scriptures and of Nature. Right on through their best array that arm would drive as easily as through purest vacancy. The Mighty One is Almighty. He has in the largest degree all the elements of might known to us. As a creative force, and as source of all the great natural forces, He is infinitely more forceful than they. As source of all natural structures, so various and exquisite, He has an intelligence beyond any limit you can assign. And then His intelligence and physical force have a whole broad eternity to act in. These are the Three Mighties of God. They give us a being whose powers cannot be matched or approached. Not among the gods of the nations. Not among the sublimest fancies of the poet. A mere man is sometimes called His High Mightiness. I show you now a being who deserves the name.

The Mighty God has spoken. Has He? Is it indeed true that the Creator has opened up communication with His creatures? Then He has wishes and purposes concerning us. Then He

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means to concern Himself more or less in our affairs, and no sense of immeasurable superiority leads Him to scorn intercourse with the dwellers on His footstool. Has He indeed spoken? Then we may be sure that what He has said is well worth the hearing. Some great information must be floating about us, waiting for the ears of the wise. But *can* it be?

Yes. God is not the everlastingly silent Being which a shallow philosophy once thought, and which sinful hearts may still sometimes wish. Is it likely that a father who can speak to his children has never done it? Is it possible that a king, in the course of a long reign, has never once said a word to his subjects? We do not believe it. The great silence has been broken. God spoke to Adam in the garden. He spoke to Abraham amid the pastures of Canaan. He spoke to Moses in the solitudes of the desert. With a great voice that whole hosts could hear, He spoke to the host of Israel at Sinai. And still later He has spoken to still larger hosts, and far more fully and loudly. Men were listening. The air was filled with voices of all sorts. Suddenly came in among them a voice grand and sweet beyond all its fellows. It seemed as if the

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deafest and most distant must hear. Many did hear. Their ears caught the direction of that great sound, and, looking up, they saw One filling the sky from whose parted lips rivers of speech were still flowing — concerning Himself, His character, His will, His claims on men and their rejection of these claims, a consequent wrath and penalty, a way of escape by the sacrifice of Christ and a practical faith in Him, great and varied motives to such faith. As they listened they could not doubt they were hearing God. They sank on their knees and worshiped.

Of course I am speaking of the Bible. Here is God's voice loudly written. "And I saw a Book written within and on the backside, and sealed with seven seals." One was the seal of miracles, another the seal of prophecy, another the seal of special providences, another the seal of adaptation to human nature and wants, another the seal of a triumphant experience, and so on — *seven* seals, and each the seal of a king. Never was document better validated. Find in the archives of nations great Magna Chartas all covered with broad seals in the presence of which doubt and trifling are dumb. Let them be dumb in the presence of *these* seals, great and

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many, which God has set on the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

And called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. That is, God has not only spoken, but He has loudly called the *attention* of all men to what He has spoken.

Of course He wishes attention to His word. Did you ever know a speaker who did not care for good listeners?

But He does more than wish for attention. He *calls* strongly for it. "Search the Scriptures;" "Give earnest heed to the things which ye have heard" — hear almost any number of such loud calls. Hear them, too, in the many special measures He takes to secure attention to His Word. You may not agree with me, but I seem to myself to hear them when I see God in His providence so hugely multiplying copies of the Bible in almost all tongues; also when I see that providence calling forth so vast a religious literature, every volume of which points steadily at the Bible. Why has God decreed a sabbath? It is chiefly that men may have *times*, many and stated, in which to attend to the Bible. Why will He have churches dotting the land by thousands and thousands? It is chiefly that men

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may have *places* in which to attend to the Bible. Why will He have ministers of religion in vast numbers? It is chiefly that men may have *persons* to call their attention to what the Bible contains. Have you ever had a different view of the purpose of the ministry? If so, think a moment and correct it. Not mere orators on any religious theme, no matter what; not mere sabbath speculators in anything that can be called theology; but preachers of the Word—here you have their business, and the whole of it; a fact never to be forgotten by those who speak in Christian sanctuaries and by those who hear.

So bent is God on having due notice taken of His Book, that He is not content with the services of a special class to this end, but seeks to enlist all His friends, saying, "Let him that heareth say, Come." "Whosoever shall do and teach my words shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven." "They shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up." In all this He does what is equal to lifting up a

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great voice, saying, "Attend ye, attend ye, to the Book which tells what I have spoken!

This call is to *all* men. These ministers, these sanctuaries, these sabbaths, are no provincial nor national institutions. They are for "all the world" and "every creature" — like the Gospel itself. Though the Old Testament was sent first to the Hebrews, though parts of the New Testament were first sent to individuals and local churches, yet we now know that the whole Bible was meant for the whole human race by Him who would have "all men come to the knowledge of the truth." Sent under cover to parts for the whole — is this an unheard of thing?

How does a human government seek to draw general attention to its laws? It prints them, posts them in certain conspicuous places, multiplies copies and sends them out in all directions, appoints a class of men whose business it shall be to know the laws and give information about them to all inquirers. If, in addition, it is made the duty of this special class to inform even non-inquirers, and to go up and down the land as heralds of the law, crying, "Oyez," "Oyez!" then the government would be held to have cried *attention* to all its subjects. All this God has

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done. He has printed His will. He has sent forth endless copies of it in every direction. He posts them in churches and sabbaths. He proclaims them, whether men will hear or forbear, at the lips of a host of professional heralds, and lays it on the conscience of all His friends to see that ministers and churches and sabbaths go everywhere. This should be held a general summons to the world. Hear, all ye ends of the earth!

It is true that all people do not as yet know of this call. Many years may pass before all ears will be widely open to the voice of the Lord calling attention to the Bible as being what He has spoken. Yet the call is real. I have often spoken loudly to people who did not hear. They were asleep. Their fingers were in their ears. So not a syllable really reached them. But it was not my fault. My proclamation to them was just as real as if it had shaken the earth and waked the dead. So is this Divine proclamation. Some do not hear it, some *will* not hear it; but it is meant for all, is needed by all, is on the way to all, and would ere this have reached all if all had done the Divine bidding.

"Whoso hath ears to hear, let him hear!" If

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one should print these words in golden letters on the cover of his Bible, God's letter would not be too broadly directed. It has the gift of tongues. It speaks in all languages. It stands and cries like the angel of the Apocalypse — toward the four winds — and the great voice is rolling round the whole world. It means the Gentiles as well as the Jews who say, "God speaks to us alone — what have you to do with the God of Israel, ye strangers and aliens?" It means the philosophers who think they know too much to need the Bible, as well as the simple who think they know too little. It means the Pharisees and Brahmins of society who feel too good for it, as well as the publicans and sinners who feel too bad for it. It means the business men who are so scant of time, as well as the idlers who are so scant of disposition. It means the little children who are thought too young, as well as the tottering fathers and mothers who are thought too old. It means everybody — even the nobodies. Let them all arouse and attend to what God has spoken. His words are in His Book; let all the people attend to that.

How should this call be treated? I will not insult your understandings by trying to prove that

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it should have respect and even veneration. It should have much more, even *obedience.* You should actually give the attention called for. Treat God's letter to you as a loyal subject of some great monarch would naturally treat a written communication from him. He would at once take it reverently in hand, would study out all its dark passages, would possess himself fully of its contents, would weigh them well and even lay up the substance of them in his memory. Do you as much to what God has spoken. Be not content with putting a finely-bound Bible on your parlor table, nor with hearing it talked about for a little while every Sunday; nor with speaking well of it, and even making profound obeisance toward it in thought and speech, as a Moslem does bodily toward Mecca. Read, understand, weigh. Call up the Book from the horizon where it seems so small. Open it widely. Set it in the light. Let your eyes beam on it like stars. Arm your naked sight with all helpful lenses, as does the student of Nature. Nay, put the Book within you. Treat it better than you do any other book, instead of worse, as too many do.

Consider. This Book is *intrinsically* a great thing. Ask true scholars and they will tell you.

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Whoever has an eye to literary merit, whoever wants great truth on great themes, whoever wants the best moral and religious guide extant in the world, let him look at this most ancient volume. It is true, wholly true, and has all the truth essential to be known on the subject of subjects. By far the most valuable book in a world crowded with books. This, putting it solely on its intrinsic merits. So we all believe. No doubt you are willing to say with me that the king who once set his Bible a blazing with gold and gems did not give it an outside richer than the inside.

This great treasure comes from the *highest possible source.* I hope you have great thoughts of God. No danger of your having too great. Nature herself is beyond our thinking; how much more the Author of Nature. Were you in Heaven itself, and, from that vantage ground, should try to shoot your thought up to that summit where stands the throne of Him who is eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent, though your bow abides in strength, you would yet, watching the flight with all your eyes, be overwhelmed to see how small a part of the untold distance your arrow succeeds in passing through. One digging among the ruins of ancient Rome turns

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up a piece of gold. A glance shows him that he has found precious metal and much of it; and he is glad accordingly. But when the antiquaries have shown him that what he has found came from the old Cæsars, and is really the historic seal which from Augustus downward was used for all imperial edicts, it takes on new value in his eyes. Yesterday he would have sold it for a guinea or two; to-day he must have a hundred times as much, and all the markets for such things are ready to give him what he asks.

The source of the Bible could not be higher. And then the Most High is *calling attention* to the Book in the emphatic manner we have seen. This puts its claim to notice on still higher ground. Had God contented Himself with merely giving the Bible — if He had never stood and pointed at it and cried, "Behold ye, Behold ye!" — cried it loudly and long — neglect would have been a much less grave matter. As the case stands, it is well nigh inexcusable. Such special efforts on the part of God beget special obligations on ours. It is as if you have, not only a letter from the king, but the letter delivered by special messenger. He comes with the royal equipage. His steeds are flecked with foam. A

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star shines on his breast, and around him is the broad baldrick of an earl. And he cries, as he puts the message in your hand, "This from the king — let it have prompt and careful heeding." Now you are under great pressure. To neglect the letter has now become a great thing. Will you carelessly toss it aside to await your convenience, or cast your eye lightly over it as if it were the effusion of a school-boy?

Think, also, that the Bible is the *only* written message from God to men that ever has been or will be. Among the so-called sacred books this only is genuine. It contains all that God has written to us in past ages. In all the ages to come, will come from. Him no further revelation. No more is needed. The Book is already a complete rule of faith and practice. Out of it the man of God may be thoroughly furnished to every good word and work. So the Canon is closed. Look not for even the smallest addition. It must be what we have or nothing. This fact may well deepen our interest in the Bible — just as the fact that this letter which I hold in my hand is the first I ever had from Victoria, and in all probability will be the last, may well give it special value to me; just as the fact that the imperial seal which

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I have dug up among the ruins of the Palatine has no fellow, and from the nature of the case can have none in all the ages to come, may well make me prize it all the more. I grasp it closely with my hand. I grasp it quite as closely with my eyes. *The only Cesarian seal extant* — as I think of it I double the price I had thought of asking. My customer, as he thinks of it, doubles the price he had thought of giving. He is almost ready to take it at any price.

Never a book made such *a stir in the world as this.* It has been more talked and written about, has been more loved and hated, has had more great battles fought over it than any other book in existence. See whether it deserves all this ado. Your tax-collector puts up his petty proclamation. The governor of a petty state sends out a proclamation somewhat larger for our yearly fast. The President of our whole country yearly gives us a document more imposing still in behalf of a national thanksgiving. A few years ago went out from the national capital a paper of yet greater moment — the Proclamation of Emancipation — by which millions of hereditary bondmen passed from under the yoke. And we are hoping for the time when a Congress of nations

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will put forth a manifesto more illustrious yet — one emancipating the whole world from the horrors and oppressions of war. What a sublime thing that will be! But, going on and upward still, going long and far, we at last come to a summit of proclamations; one greatly the most famous and comprehensive and influential of all, and including all; one that calls for Heaven's dues, a fast for sin, a thanksgiving for salvation, liberty for Satan's captives, peace on earth and good-will to men to the world's end. Of course I mean the Bible. Never was such manifesto. What other, unaided by fire and sword, has made such a fame among the most intelligent of mankind? What other has made such durable changes in human society? Is it not strange that men need to be asked to look with special interest on such a Magna Charta as this?

In this Book multitudes have, as they suppose, found *vast blessings* — pardon, strength, comfort inexpressible, and even eternal life. Is it really so? Are these men deluded, or is the Bible that great religious Ophir which Bacon and Newton and Boyle thought it? Surely it is a matter worth inquiring into. When so many and such men cry out in enthusiastic tones, "I have found

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it," "I have found it," and clap their hands exultingly, it surely is worth while for poor, hungry, naked people to run together to see if there be not help for them also. If human testimony is good for anything, a large and splendid experience has proved the Bible the most useful of books; a very encyclopedia of truths, and comforts, and helps of the choicest kinds. Much is said in these days about the value of experiment as a source of knowledge. Some will have it that nothing deserves the name of knowledge that comes by any other means. They bid us try it on the Bible. The men of whom I speak profess to have done so, and with very great success. Are they right? Institute an inquiry. See for yourselves how much there is in this sort of talk. It certainly is by no means unlikely that a revelation from God should have in it as much as these men claim to have found; nor unlikely that you must find like blessings in the same place. You confess as much. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life."

And then I would have you *prudent.* When the Mighty God calls is it safe not to answer? When He bespeaks your attention to what He has said, will it do to withhold it? Leaving out

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of view all warnings found in the Book itself, is it not, from the nature of the case, more than possible that some great harm may come to you if you neglect Him who speaketh from Heaven? Unlimited patience would be no merit in a moral governor. It seems as if the creation might rue the day in which its Great Ruler should resolve on never being a terror to evil-doers, and settle down into a monarch of ice or stone whom no extent of ill-treatment can rouse to justice and judgment. Divine patience may be an ocean; but it is not safe to deem it an ocean without a shore. No reasonable man can be quite free from misgivings while neglecting the loud calls of such a being as God.

Yes. The Bible should have profound attention. If a Divine Revelation should not have it, what is there in the wide universe that should! No doubt its claim should be honored at sight. But think of it — what intrinsic merit, what lofty origin, what loud calls for attention; a Book without a fellow or successor, one of the world's Great Powers, a winner of golden opinions from the wisest and best — is it well and prudent to treat this Book as some do? In the case of not a few it is almost displaced by the omnipresent news-

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paper or novel. Some make business their Bible — both Bible and God. Some make Nature their Bible — both Bible and God. Love of speculation, and of what some people choose to call philosophy, crowds out of sight the message from Heaven Instead of going to this and finding what it teaches, say about immortality and a future state of rewards and punishments, they begin to reason about what can be and cannot be, just as if God had not already written out for us just the information we seek. Perhaps ministers are sometimes to blame for this. We take our text. We ask, Can this be proved from the light of Nature? And so we spend our whole time in trying to get from reason some faint echoes of God's voice in the Bible. As if a plain Scripture could be made more credible in this way! As if *our* names written across its back or face could strengthen the Word of the Lord! In view of the harm apt to be done in this way, I have sometimes felt like promising myself that I would never question Nature on a matter of which the Bible has clearly spoken. What is the use? Why divert the gaze of men from the Book? When God has spoken why should they waste their time in trying to see by other lights!

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When the sun is shining why light our lamps? Can we see any better? Rather the worse. The day is poisoned by our candles. We perplex and weaken the eyes we seek to help.

In this day of many books, remember The Book. The world is so full of things asking to be read or heard — things novel, things startling, things most adventurously and dexterously put, things dressed up and spiced up with all manner of intellectual cookery, that the temptation is strong to overlook the familiar volume whose plain wholesome accents have been sounding in our ears from childhood. Resist the devil. What if the Book is an old story? Some have caught the art of finding it always new; do you as much. Give it something that deserves to be called *attention.* Study it day and night. Study it with a plenty of upward looking for help. Go to that directly for your doctrines and your rules of living. Decline to take your Gospel at second-hand — even from commentaries. I do not counsel you to do without commentaries; only to use them with a certain reserve and caution. Some of them are poor helps. Satan is in some of them. Some have come from a country that has dishonored Protestantism and the right of private judgment by a most irreverent and quixotic hand-

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ling of the Word of God; and not a little of the bad leaven has forced its way into our native books. So be on your guard. Do not be at the trouble to send four thousand miles for the meaning of your Bibles. It is quite unnecessary. Your want can be met nearer home. Go to headquarters. Drink at the fountain's head. The best commentator on the Bible is itself. Do its plain bidding, pray over it abundantly, and your whole body shall be full of light. Do not ask captious questions. Never allow yourself in anything that looks like wresting the Scripture. When you have found out what the Book says, regard the saying as *final*. Make your farthing candle of a reason submit to the sun. If you do not, you will be sorry as long as you live — and longer. If you do, you will be glad as long as you live — and longer. You will become wise unto salvation. You will escape all heresy. You will not be beaten about "with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive:" and as for that maelstrom of guesses and suppositions and disputations, sometimes called philosophy, in which so many barks are cast away, you will so please God as to escape from it. Not a small escape. Few come safely out from that vortex.

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III.

HIS RIGHT TO ATTEND TO OUR AFFAIRS.

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III.

HIS RIGHT TO ATTEND TO OUR AFFAIRS.

SOMETIMES we hear a man spoken of with praise as being "one who attends to his own business." Sometimes we hear a man, with fire in his eye and fire on his tongue, tell his neighbor to "mind his own business." Such sayings, however much of the rude and bad may be about them, proceed on the very just idea that one may have affairs with which no other person has a right to concern himself. He must not insert his hand in them, he must not judge them, he must not even inquire about them. And if he refuses to give them any attention whatever, and busies himself wholly with his own farm, or his own trade, or his own soul, he deserves high praise as being both prudent and just.

And yet affairs of this strictly private sort are very few. Very seldom indeed can you properly claim that your neighbor has no right to concern

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himself in any way or degree with what you are doing or experiencing. You can always object to certain modes and degrees of interference, but very seldom to interference itself. Say that you have taken up with a certain system of culture on your farm, or a certain system of training in your family. Should any neighbor interfere in the way of brute force against your system you would have cause to complain of him. Should he interfere morally — with his arguments, entreaties, remonstrances — so incessantly and loudly as to make it a vexatious persecution, you might well object. But you are very far from having a right to say that he shall not concern himself at all, in any way or shape, with your style of farming or with your way of bringing up your family. He has a right to look into the propriety of your method, to make temperate statement to you of such evils in it as he supposes himself to have found, to take measures to hinder the spread of such a method in the community in case his honest judgment is against it as a whole. So in most other cases — it is not the fact of interference on the part of your neighbor that you are entitled to object to ; only certain modes and degrees of interference. Each man's affairs and in-

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terests are so interlocked with those of his fellow-men that they must largely stand or fall together: and there is hardly any matter which is his business which does not thus become theirs. And even if his affairs had no bearing whatever on the interests of others, the great law of benevolence might still require them to make such affairs matters of more or less attention and even active interference.

So much for interferences on the part of our fellow-men. What about interferences on the part of *God?* To what extent is He entitled to make our business His business; to concern Himself with what we are doing, and being, and experiencing; to occupy Himself with our character, our actions, and our welfare? We must now widen our proposition. We must even cast off from it all limitations and exceptions. If our human neighbor may properly concern himself with most of our affairs, God may properly concern Himself with all of them. Be sure there is not a solitary exception — not a thing on which God has not a right to put His hand. Though it is *very* delicate, private, personal, still He has a right to inquire into it, to judge it, to insert at any or every point the hand of His activity in just

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the measure and at just the angle He chooses. Now and then you may say to your fellow-man who presses you with his advice or his protest, his help or his hindrance, that it is no concern of his: but you can never be warranted in saying or thinking as much toward God, whatever the measure or manner of the interference He sees fit to put forth upon you. He attends to His own business; but let all whom it may concern take notice that it is a part of His business to attend to the business of all other beings.

See how God occupies Himself in our affairs! He informs Himself as to them all, and is not content till He has carried a searching gaze into every nook and corner of our history and into the smallest particulars of our lives. He takes possession of all our secrets, uncovers all our hiding-places, insists on going with our feet, and even with our thoughts and feelings, on all their most private expeditions. He insists, too, on having an opinion on what He sees — making free to condemn or approve according to His finding of the facts. He will not only go with us wherever we go and stay with us wherever we stay, bending on us an eye that never sleeps; but He will, at every turn and in all companies, give us His ad-

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vice, whether we ask it or not, whether we are willing to have it or not. Unasked, undesired, repulsed, it may be, He still takes it upon Him to teach and discipline us, not incidentally and occasionally, but in a set system of education — rebuking, commanding, threatening, chastising even, as He sees occasion. He takes our hand and draws us hither and thither. Now he beckons us, and now he scourges us, toward certain paths. He makes free with our property, our friends, our pleasures — to increase or lessen them, as He sees fit. In our plans and enterprises (all of them, whether great or small) He will have something to do, as well as something to say; either helping us or hindering us in His high independence. He especially busies Himself with our sins and virtues; whether they are great enough to startle the coarsest eyes of men, or are like the motes that scarce show under the microscope and the sunbeam. Like the tireless waves and murmurs of the seas are His actions and counteractions; His accusations and condemnations; His strivings with us, for us, and against us. He keeps a minute account of all our affairs, and has given out that He will one day bring us into formal judgment as to every work and every

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secret thing, whether it be good or evil — punishing and rewarding on the boundless field of an everlasting life; and doubtless He will be as good as His word.

It is hard to see how God could busy Himself in our affairs more than he actually does, according to the Scriptures. It is of this unbounded interference, however annoying it may be felt by many, that we are bound to allow the most absolute propriety. No doubt it is perfectly right that He should make our business His in all that astonishing variety and breadth of interference of which the Bible tells us.

Notice several of the foundations on which this right rests.

It is, in part, the right of a trustee to manage to the best of his judgment the affairs of those who have voluntarily made them over to him for that purpose — or who should have done so.

There are many instances of such trusteeship delivered and accepted between men and men. When the assignment is cordially made, perhaps pressed on the friend whose only motive to accept is his good will, who doubts the right of that friend to occupy himself busily in the affairs of his trust? All his dealings to preserve and im-

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prove the estate intrusted to him are purely a "minding of his own business"! Go on, accepted and accepting trustee, go on with your careful inspections of buildings and lands, and tools and notes; and, when the exact state of all is well understood, proceed to secure, to repair, to alter, to strengthen, to pull down, to throw aside, to cultivate as shall seem to you called for by the best interests of the estate. Who shall blame you? All men confess that it has become your business to attend to the business of another.

And it is on this principle that we are able to justify a part of Divine interferences in human affairs. They are those of a *trustee* looking after the interests of a trust cordially made, warmly pressed, and formally accepted. A great number of men have begged leave to make over, and have actually made over without reserve, to God, the affairs of themselves and their families, to be managed in all respects at His discretion. In a spirit of disinterested good will He has accepted the trust. And now, when in discharge of it He keeps His eye open on the whole history of such persons (we call them Christians) down to its most secret and trifling chapters, and meets them at every turn with His counsel, His commands, His

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constraints, His chastisements, His actions and counteractions, His pleasant or unpleasant disciplines and cultures of many kinds and modes, no one who knows the privileges and duties of trusteeship will impute fault to Him on account of the mighty rain of His interferences. He has a plain right to them. They are His own business. Christians will remember this, if, in weak and tempted moments, there creeps in a sense of annoyance at the intense and ceaseless presence and pressure of the Divine Government on them. They recollect themselves. They say it is all right. This is what they have *stipulated* for, and what God has stipulated to do. He is no officious intermeddler. Awaiting in faith and patience the great issue of His crowding interpositions, they expect to find His right to manage their affairs demonstrated by the glorious success of His management, as well as by the unlimited trusteeship with which they have freely empowered Him. Whoever has not so empowered Him *should* have done so long ago. So that in respect to him God has all the rights of a trustee, if not the form.

It is, in part, the right of a philanthropist to look after the interests of the wretched, wicked, and

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endangered, and after the use made of his benefits by those receiving them.

A man who really loves his kind, and is honestly bent on being of the greatest possible use to them, has, in virtue of this very disposition, a title to occupy himself very considerably with their affairs. Who doubts that John Howard, with his warm, pitying heart and self-sacrificing wish to lighten the woes of his fellow-creatures, might well haunt the prisons of Europe, ferreting out their abuses, and probing the histories and bosoms of their wretched inmates? Suppose that, one day, while he was busy in letting in light and air to the dark and noisome cells, a criminal had met him with a frown, and angrily bidden him to "mind his own business,"— what would any person of decent reasonableness have thought of such treatment? Who doubts that the Nightingales and our own Sanitary Commission did well in haunting the camps and hospitals of war, the pallets of the poor shattered soldiers far away from home and friends, with kind, soft words and gently ministering hands, and with prayers and Bible-readings for dying men who craved them? I say, who doubts their right to busy themselves on these merciful errands — and

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did ghastly soldier ever start up from his cot and dash away from his pillow the hand that smoothed it, and talk fretfully of how people should attend to their own concerns and let those of other people alone? The Franckes, the Muellers, the Sisters of Mercy, on a thousand fields where poor humanity lies bleeding, are welcomed, applauded, universally rejoiced over as ornaments of human nature. Every reasonable person feels that the disposition and power to help the needy are broadest warrant to do so.

On just this principle we can justify a large part of Divine interferences in the affairs of men. They are the doings of a *philanthropist*, looking after, with a warm and pitying heart, the interests of poor, guilty and endangered beings. On the one hand is the world, an immense lazaretto of a thousand million patients in all stages of misery, disease, and need; on the other hand is God, yearning over them, anxious to help them, able to help them, actually going from pallet to pallet with His medicines, His surgeries, His counsels, His comforts, His providences, His Holy Spirit — a thousand ministries by which He seeks to save the lost. To a vast extent, God's dealings in our affairs are disinterested kindnesses to persons

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most plainly and immensely needy ; and who can think such helps, as they go with their soft step and gentle hand and pitying eye about his sick bed, to be an officious meddlesomeness, a going forth of Deity beyond His proper province, and a faulty minding of things that do not belong to Him ?

It is, in part, the right of a father to look after the affairs of his children.

Is there not such a right as this ? Do not reason and the general voice of mankind bear a man out in looking carefully to the ways of his household — pointing out their faults, correcting them, commending their good conduct and encouraging it by fitting rewards ; guiding, restraining, chastising, educating ; and to this end exploring their character, habits, and movements at every considerable point ? All the world says, Yes. Not only the right but the duty of a father is it, to know what his children are about, what characters they are forming ; and to hedge them into right ways by a wide variety of interferences, always loving, but sometimes magisterial and severe. It is his business to attend to their business. He is never more doing for himself than when he is attending to them : and, while he is carefully watch-

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ing over their ways and doing his best to bring them up to a virtuous and honorable maturity, what foolish man is it that says that the father is unwarrantably meddling, and should attend to his own business?

See the way in which we can justify a large part of Divine interferences in our affairs. They are those of a *father* who is looking after the affairs of his children. God is the true Father; and we are His sons and daughters in our early minority. Our bodies and our souls are streamlets from that great Fount of all being; and the interest which God takes in His offspring is truly paternal. He covets to bring us up to a glorious maturity — a family worthy of Himself. But we have most unhappy dispositions, most unfortunate and perverse tendencies. We naturally take with great zeal and stubbornness to wrong paths. Who would make anything out of us, or even save us from ruin, must watch us sharply and do for us mightily. And this is just what our Divine Father undertakes. He keeps a watchful eye on all our movements. Where we go and where we stay, who is with us and what surrounds us, what we are doing and what preparing to do — He makes free to find it all out, whether we like it or

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not; and on the basis of this thorough knowledge He goes into that great variety of interferences which we know, and perhaps sometimes, in our hearts, complain of. But what right have we to complain? Is not all this a father's business? Would the great Father in Heaven keep any better within His sphere should He throw the reins on the necks of our wayward wills, and give Himself up to listening to the music of the spheres?

It is, in part, the right of a proprietor to look after the state and interests of his own property.

Do you own a farm? Then doubtless you feel warranted in looking after its condition, and in taking some care of it. And should you, under the influence of such a feeling, go on to learn the qualities of your various fields, to clear off the stones, to improve the fences, to drain away the superfluous moisture, and then, according to the nature of the ground, fertilize and cultivate to this or that crop, and even condemn a certain corner that seems incurably barren to receive the stones and other refuse matter of the whole farm, you would not be likely to find many to look over to you from the roadside and accuse you of being improperly engaged. Such a concerning yourself

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with your own fields at their various points of need would be universally thought a very proper minding of your own business.

Now this is really justifying a large part of Divine interferences in our affairs. They are those of a *proprietor* looking after his own property. You are God's property. I am his property. There is no man, and no belonging of any man, that does not fall within the scope of the same infinite proprietorship — a proprietorship more complete in its character and deep in its foundation than any that ever belonged to man. God is Creator. He made the very *substance* of everything else, and has never deeded the fee of anything to anybody. Hence, when He goes abroad with his critical eye over his great property, and especially pries into the whole state of the earthly portion of it, and goes on to put it into the best state that circumstances will permit to tireless activity and boundless resources — casting off its refuse sins; draining its marshy vices; plowing up with the sharp shares of His Providence, truth, and Spirit, the tough, thistly, fallow ground of our hearts and lives; enriching it, planting it with all Christian virtues, cultivating it with a steady and all-embracing watchfulness and industry;

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and, at last, in the exercise of His Divine judgment, giving over some incorrigible barren for the waste heap of the entire property — I say, when God is seen doing this with His own, in all the measures and manners of industrious interference that seem to His wisdom best for making the most of the great estate, who shall deny His right thus to mind His own business?

It is, in part, the right of a lawful ruler to look after the affairs of his subjects.

Is Victoria a lawful ruler — she, heir of the elect and ancient royalty of Brunswick, and herself personally the elect of her people's heart? Does any one find fault with this sovereign because she carries her cares and efforts beyond the state rooms of Buckingham, and the ancient towers of Windsor, and the parks of Balmoral, and informs herself of the state of the various classes of her subjects, and then tries to do for them according to this information? Behold her motherly thought asking how the poor may better live, the ignorant be better instructed, the vicious be better restrained or reformed; asking what old laws need to be put in force, and what new ones made; asking what merit she shall raise to honors, and what demerit she shall pluck down;

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asking whom she shall shelter with the public shield, and whom threaten with the public sword. Who doubts she has a right to do all this? We say, it is her *business* to attend to the affairs of her subjects. She would be a great criminal should she neglect to do so. How absurd would it be for some chancery that has been purified by her efforts, some public servant who has been ennobled by her patent, some criminal who has been pardoned by her clemency or punished by her justice, to frettingly cry out that she should mind her own business!

Pass we from this sovereign to a higher, and justify another large part of Divine interferences in the affairs of men. They are those of a lawful *ruler* looking after the welfare of His dominions. On the one hand we have God — ruler by perfect qualifications as greatest and best, also by right of eternal possession of the throne, also by free choice of all wise and good. On the other hand we have this world of men — one small province of the empire, in which there is not a person who does not owe allegiance to the King eternal, immortal, invisible. And this our King does not, as He should not, confine Himself to His Windsor in the skies. Downward and abroad, through

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all His endless provinces, He pours the floods of His mighty observing and of His mighty doing. Behold the comforting of sorrow, the relief of want, the teaching of ignorance, the reform of guilt, the commanding of the wayward, the restraint and punishment of the incorrigible, the reward of merit! Is this something to be clamored against, or even thought against? I will not say it — nor will you. But you will, on the contrary, say, as you see the point of a Divine scepter touching every human enterprise and stirring the secret depths of every human plan, Let no man, from sunrise to sunrise, venture to speak or think a complaint against this interfering God — at least no one who admits that a lawful sovereign is only minding his own business when he looks closely after the state and conduct of his subjects.

It is, in not a few cases, the sum of all the foregoing rights.

Put weight after weight on the same object till its supporting power is exhausted. Lay mortgage after mortgage on the same estate till its whole value is covered. This is what God has done on many things — especially on our faculty of accepting the teaching and doing the bidding of the

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Bible. His right to this is not single but many. He puts on it claim after claim. It is mortgaged to Him over and over again on many distinct grounds — on the ground of His disinterested philanthropy, of His tender fatherhood, of His absolute ownership, of His eternal sovereignty; on the ground also of His trusteeship, for if any have not yet freely given Him this they *ought* to do so without delay. No one can decline to be a Bible disciple without shooting an arrow at each of these divine relations; and let every one consider the guilt of such a manifold assault on Him with whom we have to do.

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IV.

MEN AS HIS SUBJECTS.

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MEN AS HIS SUBJECTS.

SOME nations go by the name of *subjects*. They are British, or German, or Austrian subjects — being under regal or imperial government. But we never hear of the subjects of Switzerland, or of the United States. The people of these countries call themselves citizens. As republicans they think themselves free of all men, call no man master, even make themselves out to be sovereigns.

Still, whatever name men bear, and whatever name they choose for themselves, whether royalists or republicans, subjects or citizens, it cannot be concealed that every person, the wide world over, is a true subject. The government visibly nearest us is republican; but then, outside of this, and closely embracing it at all points, is another of far greater significance; and this government is *monarchical* in the strongest sense of the term. It is that of the King eternal, immortal, invisible. He royally governs us by the laws of Nature. His providence shapes our courses and fortunes,

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compels us this way and that, gives us this and that experience, after a most sovereign manner. He makes and writes out statutes for us in our own consciences and in a Book. Behold the Law and the Prophets! Behold the New Testament laws! They are His crown, His throne, His scepter toward us. They make him our King.

Our relation to God as subjects is no new thing. It goes back as far as we do. That little child whose helplessness is embosomed and carried about by parental care and strength is also embosomed and carried about by the great government of God. Not sooner did the light find its way through the silky curtains of those dawning eyes, than did God, with a crown on His head and a scepter in His hand, look in at them and say, "*My subject.*" And He keeps on saying it till His words fall on the dull ears of the hoary headed man.

The individual goes back to no time when he was not the subject of this King. Nor does the race itself go back so far, though it be sixty centuries, as to find a time when there was no divine scepter stretched over it. From Eden downward, God has always governed men right royally. No period, nor race, nor nation in which He has

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not set up His throne. Sometimes we speak of the Jewish Theocracy as if God had never been king over the Gentiles; but the fact is, that this kingly relation to the chosen people was but a particular and more visible form of that sovereignty that had already been ruling for ages over young and old, high and low, bond and free in all lands. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of thy sanctuary!" All nations, all races, all historic periods, have come and gone at the hands of His imperial providence; have been threaded in every direction by the steps of a Lawgiver on whose head were many crowns, and in His hand many scepters.

And we shall be subjects *always*. There is no loop-hole of retreat through which, by some dexterous management, one may slip out from the kingdom of God. To do this one would have to go further and manage better than ever did creature yet. Should a sense of this relation to God come to prove irksome to us, we may for a time get rid of the unpleasant sense of it; but as to getting rid of the fact itself, as men sometimes rid themselves of a human king — where is the man that shall see that feat accomplished! The German subject who dislikes the empire, may, by

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going at the most but a few hundred miles, cross the frontier and find himself a German subject no longer. Who shall cross the frontier of God's empire? The Austrian subject who dislikes the empire of the Hapsburgs may, perhaps, by a well contrived insurrection, cast off the odious scepter and become an Italian again: but who, by any possibility, can make successful insurrection against the scepter of Jehovah? No, as a man is born so will he live and so will he die — under the same steadfast sovereignty.

And this Divine sovereignty will last through all *generations* as well as through our individual lives. Is not God yonder — and yonder? Look carefully away into the distance and you will be sure to catch at least a glimpse of Him in His shining royalty. He sets up His throne in the next century, and the next, and the next — and in what century does He not set it up? I ascend my Pisgah and look down through ages beyond counting, and lo, the King in every one of them. I take my best telescope and look still further through all the ages that angels or God shall see; and nowhere along these awful stretches of distance do I find this Infinite Monarch in a state of abdication or dethronement. Thy throne, O God,

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is forever and ever. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion is from generation to generation.

Man is a *complete* subject. Body and soul — he is wholly in God's power. Now God be thanked that no other being is awful with such power as this! The laws of God are laid on all parts of our nature and on all our relations. In this respect the Divine King goes before, far before, any human one. The secondary monarchs that head our tribes and nations single out a few outward acts to be bidden or forbidden, and put forth their laws accordingly; but by far the larger part of outward acts, and all our thoughts and feelings, are left untouched by these mortal scepters. But the immortal scepter of the King of kings is laid at full length on all things, without exception, within His endless dominion — especially on all that comes in any degree under the control of human will. You cannot mention a thing in the least affected by your choice, in regard to which God has not sent you a law which He will enforce. See how wide is your subjection! Everything at all voluntary is under the yoke of conscience and Scripture — which is the yoke of God. The authority of God is a

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gleaner after all other authorities. It comes in and appropriates not only what other governments have reaped, but also their profuse leavings, till not a solitary stalk is left. That keen sickle sweeps the whole field clean at a stroke. So thoroughly are we subjects. So completely do our whole moral being and history lie within the golden circle of the crown of crowns. Though the least obvious of all sovereignties — though it allows our senses no certain signals of itself in the form of visible palaces and regalia and body-guard and a diademed and throned personage who is the center of all the courtly pomp — still this sovereignty of God is the broadest and most emphatic which our thought can conceive.

And it is the most *absolute.* Nothing to hinder God from doing just as He pleases. In making laws and executing them He has nothing to consult but His own most sweet and holy will. The chief magistrate of a republic must guide himself by that constitution which others have made for him; the Queen must not act without her Ministers and Parliament; and even the emperor of what is called a despotism feels that he must shape his rule with some regard to public opinion. His absolutism is "tempered by assas-

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sination." But what has God to fear should His course cross the wishes and sentiments of His subjects? His independence is perfect. Who shall bring Him to account? Who shall make Him afraid? Show us the armies that can manage to drag the Omnipotent from His high seat! He can, with entire safety, set at defiance all the wishes and mights of all His creatures. In point of fact, He *does* work all things after the counsel of His own will. Behold the Absolutism! Not merely chief magistrate, not merely First Consul, President, Lord Protector, King, is He; but immemorial and immeasurable Autocrat and Dictator — taking His authority from no one, giving no account of any of His matters, allowing no appeal from His tribunal, issuing His laws and executing them without taking counsel of any; in fine, doing according to His will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, without any to stay His hand, or say to Him, What doest thou?

When we look at the great European absolute monarchy, and see threescore and ten millions of men holding life and all at the beck of one man, we find ourselves deeply impressed. How Alexander shines from his terrible hight — espe-

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cially to his own proper subjects! Do they forget that they are living under a scepter? Do they forget that the scepter under which they live is absolute? Yet what is the monarchy of all the Russias by the side of the monarchy of God? Shall men look up dizzily at the hight of the one, and yet have no eye of amazement for that other summit so unspeakably above? Shall they quietly drop out of their lives that the Divine government is not a democracy, nor a republic, nor an oligarchy, nor even a mere monarchy, but a monarchy the sole spring of which is one infinite and irresponsible will? Shall they bow and tremble before an earthly throne which began to-day and may end to-morrow, and yet feel no sinking of the soul before that Divine Throne which carries the sweep of unlimited authority through the wide circuit of creation and abides in unwasted grandeur from everlasting to everlasting? What though we do not, just at this present, see about us certain things such as are wont to proclaim a monarch of the first class — the gorgeous capital, the palace, the crown, the marching armies! These things, or their equivalents, exist; and some of them have been seen. A little beyond the edge of vision troop legions of

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angels. Away in the sky the city of God uprears ineffable palaces where His diadem sparkles, His throne is set, and His august court is held. Sometimes His shining soldiery have trod the earth in view of men; sometimes prophets have caught a glimpse of the metropolis, Jerusalem, fixed on its everlasting hills or coming down from God out of Heaven. On a day that hastens, the glorious "pomp and circumstance" that really belong to the Great Monarchy will be seen by all. For the present we will take it on trust. The Bible shall be to us for eyes.

Conscript subjects! The subjects of a human king are held to owe him, on occasion, military service; and many a time does the trumpet sound and imperatively call them to the field. God our King has His wars. They are of such a nature that the youngest, the oldest, and the weakest can successfully engage in them; are of such a nature that the services of every subject are in demand. So the trumpet sounds. Forth into the field of sharp and steady strife against sin and Satan, God's ancient enemies and ours! No exceptions are allowed, under any excuse whatever.. We can neither buy nor beg off from the holy campaign. No pressure of business or

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of infirmity will secure our discharge. It is a case of conscription. Behold the roll — every name is on it. Hearken to the trumpet — every name is shouted to the four winds. Says the herald, "War is declared, the foe is abroad, go forth *every one* of you to the fight. Take to yourselves the whole armor of God. Be good soldiers. Quit you like men, be strong, watch you, stand fast; for you wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of the darkness of this world. You have evil tendencies — conquer them. You have evil habits — slay them. Temptations to new sins as well as to old ones assault you daily and hourly — fight against them with all your forces. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. But he that is overcome will get no quarter from his foes and no indulgence from his sovereign."

Though man's relation to God as subject has these strong and stern features, though he is to the crown of Heaven a real, ancient, permanent, complete, and conscript subject, yet the subjection is altogether *just and exceedingly honorable.* God is our rightful King. He has a perfect right to reign over the race from its distant beginning

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to its distant end; to reign over all its relations and interests, activities and experiences of every kind and degree; to reign over them as a conscripting king whose commanding trumpets call out all his subjects into the field of war against sin and death and hell. He is so good, so capable; we are so narrow, so blind, so tempted, so unfit to have our own way; it is matter for profound satisfaction that He has chosen to include us within the circumference of His kingly rule. It is right. It is best for all parties. We can be good subjects, and He is sure to be the best of masters. He always treats His subjects well. Never asks of them anything beyond their ability; never asks what is not for their advantage. Never is severer with them than is absolutely necessary; never keeps back from them any favor that He can consistently grant. His great study, so to speak, is to be of service to them. Their cup, here and hereafter, shall have as much of sweet and as little of bitter as circumstances will allow. Know Him for the tenderest of monarchs that ever blazed on a throne. One so forbearing and placable never held the fates of men in his hands. And His government is the only one for the support of which the subject has absolutely

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nothing to pay. This King maintains His own great state. His Civil List never appears to you or me. We have but to admire, rejoice in, and take the benefit of, a glory that costs us nothing. And it is vastly honorable to be the loyal subjects of God. Perhaps the word *subject* has to your republican ears a somewhat unpleasant sound; but to be the leal-hearted subjects of such a magnificent and wondrous empire as that of Jehovah is really a higher honor than to stand at the head of any earthly kingdom. His hearty service is liberty itself. We have angels and archangels as companions in it. The loyal subject, by virtue of that very character, becomes a son of God and heir of heavenly kingdoms; and if you can take the hight of such a summit as that, you can do more than St. Paul supposed possible to him. No arrow was ever shot at so high a mark. No thoughts of men ever went so far heavenward.

And yet, alas, man is naturally an *insubordinate* subject. Though his subjection to God is rightful, tenderly enforced, and highly honorable, he does not relish it. He does no little to cast it off. Sometimes he flatly refuses to obey the laws of his sovereign. He always neglects to do it — always thinks of God and His government as lit-

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tle as may be. Instead of giving complete homage and service, he gives none at all, save what is purely involuntary. Instead of battling against sin, conscript soldier as he is for that very purpose, all his battling is in sin's favor. Can he tell of one single act of cordial obedience? Not one. Is there one stricken field, one fortification, one standard, one spear even, of the enemy which he has carried or heartily attempted to carry? Not one. He is a subject of the great King — but an unwilling and disloyal one. He is under God's scepter, and cannot get from under it; but he does not follow its pointings nor sway his path according to its pressure, its heavy pressure even. Perhaps he hates it, rails at it, spits upon it, shoots an arrow at it, goes against it at full charge and with grinded spear. There always have been, and still are, some such awful persons. But most are persons who forget, neglect, and quietly warp themselves away from their duty as subjects. They do not so much set out to break the laws of God as to please themselves; not so much to please themselves on the whole as to please themselves for the present. They mean *postponement.* They do not mean everlasting defiance, or even everlasting neglect, of God. The Great Scepter shall not

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always be overlooked. Shortly even its most delicate pointings shall be attended to, as well as its heavy pressures. Such is their vague or distinct purpose. And yet at this present the mildest name for them is, *insubordinate and disloyal subjects.*

And so it becomes necessary for men to be *threatened and disciplined* subjects. Insubordination and disloyalty in any monarchy that means to stand cannot be permanently allowed. It is of too much consequence that the sovereign authority of God should be upheld, for Him to allow these wayward creatures on earth to flaunt, or quietly maintain, their destructive waywardness. With all His tenderness and mercifulness, He does not allow it. *Because* He is tender and good He does not allow it. He is obliged to speak sternly and warn of dire consequences. See, He is pointing the fractious to the prisons of His empire; see, He partly draws from its scabbard the sword that is on His thigh that something of its terrible gleam may come to the eye of the hardened and hardening offender. Let men put their faces close to the Scriptures. Here, any day they choose, they may see a hand such as pointed out doom in the halls of Belshazzar, point-

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ing along the downward path before them; and, following the direction with their peering eyes, they may see in the distance, imbedded in lurid light, the frowning and windowless walls of the wofulest penitentiary that ever threatened the malefactors of any kingdom. Here, any day they choose, they may look up and see the white robes of the Most High changing to the harness of the warrior; and that sword which had hung scabbarded at His side, as if a mere State form, beginning to show its keen double-edge below the knotted fingers of a giant. God sends these apparitions upon them as so many threats. Meanwhile, He sends messengers, some of them with eloquent lips, and some with stern faces and thonged hands (you may call these last *trials*), to keep, if possible, the matter from coming to the dread point of the prison and the sword. That disloyal subject, by some means, must become loyal; and, by the pain of present sorrow and the fear of future ill, must be trained out of his evil ways and evil heart. This is the secret of the hardships and appeals that men are now having from God their King; this the secret of the visions they get from the high places of Scripture of yonder fearful prison and yonder flaming sword.

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HIS SERVICE THE BEST.

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V.

HIS SERVICE THE BEST.

TO persons trained as most Americans are, the idea of sustaining the relation of a *servant* is not apt to be very acceptable. The word sounds harshly. It speaks of inferiority, dependence, compulsion. We think we see yokes, burdens, and humiliations in it. Our choice is toward freedom, independence, sovereignty; and through all our lives these are the shining points toward which our hopes and struggles tend.

Still, in certain circumstances, men do not shrink from either the name or the fact of service. Indeed, they accept both with the greatest alacrity. Everything depends on *who* the party is to whom the service is to be paid. The proudest officials of the country do not hesitate to call themselves the servants of the American People, and commonly are ambitious to wear the name as long as possible. The highest personages of England — the earls, the dukes, the prime minister — are free to call themselves the servants of

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the Queen, and in so doing dream not of doing themselves any indignity. The Apostles rejoiced in being called the servants of God and of Jesus, and even were glad to call themselves the servants of the church for Jesus's sake. Provided the master be sufficiently great and worthy, men can come to count his service an honor and privilege.

Happy for us that it is so! For it has fallen to the lot of us all to be servants. It is fated — we cannot escape from it. It is our natural condition — we cannot get out of it. We may ourselves bear the name of employer and master; we may have many under us; we may every day of our lives say to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to our servant, Do this, and he doeth it; yet, on inquiry it will be found that, like the Centurion, we ourselves are under authority, and that the same service which is given to us we in turn are bound to give to another. Accordingly it is said that Christ took on Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. Disguise it as men may by an adroit use of terms, from the lowest to the highest of them, they are all out at service — shut up to this condition by the appointment of Providence and the necessity of their natures.

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But, while we are helpless as to the fact of service, we are not helpless as to the kind of it. We can choose our masters. It lies altogether with us to say whether we will serve God, or serve that rebel angel called Satan, who, with many evil spirits under him, has set up a rival kingdom. This is the extent of our liberty. We cannot choose between service and no-service: only between this service and that. We cannot choose between master and no-master: only between the master who is from above and the master who is from beneath. If Elijah had been disposed, he could not have said to the Jews, Choose you this day *whether* you will serve; the most he could do was to say, "Choose you this day *whom* you will serve." And, really, this is, after all, as much liberty as a wise man would care to have. He is not frightened at the name of servant. He knows service may be a most sweet and magnificent thing; so much so that the proudest men can covet it, and boast of it, and cling to it as the highest of honors. All he wants to know is, Who is to be master. And being told that it is One who has no equal anywhere, One whose wisdom is above every wisdom; whose throne is above every throne; whose glory is above every earthly

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thing known by this name, he is satisfied. He wants no more liberty and honorable badge than are involved in the service of such a Being. It is not only better to serve Him than it is to serve elsewhere, but it is infinitely better to serve Him than it is not to serve at all — easier, safer, happier, thriftier, more honorable.

But, the choice to all of us is actually, not between the service of God and no-service, but between the service of God and that of Satan. It is when we contrast these two services, therefore, that we come at the true merits of that great question which trembles at the heart, if not on the lips, of every thoughtful hearer of the Gospel, Whom shall I choose to serve?

In the old countries the servants of great families dress in livery. One house is marked by a blue uniform, another by a red, another by a green; whatever color, material, and badge, the head of the house may choose, is worn by all his servants. So that when one of them is seen abroad, the people can say, "There goes a servant of the Earl of Derby," "This is the Duke of Devonshire's man;" "That man serves the Marquis of Nottingham," as the case may be. The very dress explains whose servant he is. As he walks down the

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Strand it is as if he were labeled with his master's name in capitals.

Down the great thoroughfare of this life we are walking as liveried servants — the servants of God in their livery, the servants of Satan in theirs. Each uniform is striking. One is a life of outward good works ; the other a life of outward evil. One is white and fine and rich as looms never wove ; the other dark and coarse and poor as never grew under the flight of the shuttle. Sometimes the dark livery appears more or less bleached or painted, and sometimes the white is badly soiled ; so that, to a careless view, the best of the one does not seem to differ much from the worst of the other. But really, in material, texture, and color, they are opposites. Hold up side by side a life of self-seeking and a life of good-doing — how widely they differ to any sound eye ! Contrast a life of godliness with one of ungodliness, a life of conscience and principle with one of impulse — how fair and white the one on the dark background of the other ! A fairer and more serviceable livery never was seen than is the Bible put in practice ; it is a robe woven and cut in Heaven by Divine hands. A livery more uncomely and uncomfortable never was seen than that which Satan makes and expects all his servants to wear.

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Is it an honorable service? This question is very apt to be asked by men of the world when a given service is proposed to them. Will it bring respect and praise and influence; or must it involve a sacrifice in these respects? "Friend, it is the service of *your Country* — that great country that your fathers anciently planted in heroism and conscience; that great country whose domain is so broad, whose millions are so many, and on whose fate the whole world is turning anxious eyes as the pivot of the present age, not to say of distant ages — this is the high and honorable work you are asked to undertake. If you serve well you shall have the best words, the best thanks, and the admiration of all patriots that know you. Will you not take the situation?"

When I am able to speak to a man after this manner in regard to the service offered, I have a strong hold on him. Not, however, such a hold as I ought to have on you, to whom is offered a voluntary service of God. For I can say to you that, in the sight of God, and of every reasonable man, there is no service so honorable as this by a whole heaven of difference. He who wants in his favor the high thoughts and good words of the Supreme Being, let him take this offered situation.

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He who covets the praise of holy angels and all perfected spirits — thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers in hosts beyond count, and glory beyond thought — let him join them in their service: for glad servants are they all to God. Whoever wants the hearty praise of good men here, the secret respect of the bad, and the high commendations of his own conscience, let him faithfully take and wear the livery of the Heavenly Master. But if he wants disrespect and dishonor with all these parties, then let him put on the livery of Satan. Satan himself shall despise him while using him. His own heart shall put him to shame. The inmost conviction of every thinking man shall cry out at his folly and sin.

In both the rival services there is work to be done and there are tools of work. But the work and tools in the two cases are altogether different. When the prodigal takes service it is to keep swine. When the chimney-sweep takes service it is with smutted broom to climb through smutted chimneys. But when one takes his country for employer and master, it may be with beaming sword to do famous and patriotic battle that shall sound like trumpets for justice and liberty through all chapters of history; or, it may be, with the

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thoughts and words of statesmen to steer an empire illustriously through troublous seas. Very different sorts of work and tools of works are these! But I can show you a greater contrast, if, in your thoughts, you will for a moment help me to put the service of God by the side of the service of Satan. The work of the one is sublime virtue; it is to get goodness for ourselves, give goodness and happiness to our fellows, and glorify our Maker. In a word, it is to put in practice the white and sublime code of our holy religion. And this high work is done by means to suit. It is done by a faultless and inspired Bible; by prayer, looking up with transfigured face and beating highways from earth to Heaven; by sabbaths, sanctuaries, ministries, from Heaven coming and to Heaven tending — surely the noblest implements for the noblest work! But the work which Satan gives his servants lies quite at the other end of the scale. It is to break down character instead of building it up; it is to bedim the government of God instead of giving it new prestige; it is to exasperate the moral ail of the community instead of abating it; it is errors, wrongs, sins, vices, crimes in all their endless variety. And the tools of this work are no better; such as

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native depravity, habits of sin, willful ignorance, abuse of conscience, corrupting example, evil men speaking or writing, and the desperate Satan himself. In short, the business of the prodigal is to feed swine, and to do it with husks and unclean vessels.

While doing their work, how differently men in different services fare! One servant is treated like a brother or son; he has the kindest words, fairest looks, most generous keeping. Another is treated like a slave. His food is the coarsest and scantiest. His lodgings are a den. He carries forward his work amid frowns and stripes and chains. These are the extreme states of service as between man and man; but they represent very well the service that always obtains between man and the two great invisible Powers. The workmen of Satan are always bondmen, and treated as such. They are lodged in the open air, are exposed to all tempests that an angry climate sends abroad, are shelterless as to all the judgments and wraths of God. They feed on the wind; nothing truly solid and nutritious is provided for their hungry and immortal natures; call it mere wind, chaff, and husks of hollow hopes and transient selfish gratifications that is doled out to

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them by their hard master day by day. He abuses them, tyrannizes over them, scourges them, loads them with galling chains. Oh, there is no dominion so severe and capricious as that of an unsanctified and ungoverned heart! But if any will be the servants of God they shall serve after the manner of sons. They shall have fair shelter and generous fare, and loving gentleness to the utmost. Against nights and storms God hides all His workmen in the secret of His pavilion; against all hurt from the government of God or from men, they are as safe as if already in Heaven. While at their shining work their better natures are nourished to the utmost by food of heavenly grace and truth. Their satisfactions are solid and enduring. No master so forbearing and gentle as theirs — no service so full of sunshine and liberty and present profit.

Such are the collaterals of the two sorts of service. Now see the contrast between their *consequences*. As the day of life closes and the sun goes down, Sin and Satan turn paymasters, and every servant of theirs receives according to his work. Never fear — the payment will be prompt and in full. Never fear — the servants will get their wages to the last farthing. But *what* wages!

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The wages of sin is death. The exceeding compensation which will be paid to such as have borne the burden and heat of the day in the service of Satan will be to go and dwell with him in wrath and ruin forever. Open widely your ears, ye men of profit and loss — I say, *such* will be the bitter consideration that sinners will get for the bitter work they have done. Let those whom this matter concerns sum up these wages and see whether they are sufficient to pay for, perhaps, threescore and ten years of labor.—The Divine service, too, has its wages. The same closing of the day that pays off the servants of Satan with death, pays off the servants of God with life. They have worn His livery, they have wrought His work; and now, at last, as the sun sinks out of sight, and they leave the vineyard where they have planted and cultivated goodness for themselves, grace for their neighbors, and glory for Almighty God, they receive each his stupendous penny a day, in the shape of an endless Heaven. On the one hand, the sinner reaps corruption from his sowing to the flesh; on the other, the saint reaps life everlasting from his sowing to the Spirit.

Behold the two services! What a contrast as to livery, and honor, and fare, and work, and

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wages! Evidently, there is much to choose between the two, — could not well be more. You cannot serve both masters at once, and must serve one of them. Which shall it be, you that can discriminate between things that differ? There would seem to be little room for hesitation; for the difference between the two services is no mole-hill. To the heavenly service belong the glorious wages, the excellent work, the generous treatment, the high honor, the snowy livery. To the other belong the evil appearance, the evil fame, the evil deeds, the evil heart, the evil fare, and the evil wage of that apostate spirit who stands as master and paymaster.

Yes. A very slender inspection of these two rival services shows a mighty difference between them in point of eligibility. But this difference is really far greater than we can now see. The service of God is far better, and that of Satan far worse than can now be realized by the most careful and candid critic of the two. In this world the better service is designedly left somewhat under a cloud, and amid surroundings of embarrassment and sacrifice, in order to try the mettle and fidelity of men. It is better, fairer, more prosperous, honorable, and lucrative than it seems

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to be. Those who embrace it, and hold fast to it in these days of its comparative shadow, hardship, and unpopularity, will at last find themselves to have had a vastly better situation than they thought. All honor to the man who stands by the right side when it is in the minority and seems to need help! All honor (and, it will surely be found, all profit too) to the man who puts on the white livery and firmly wears it in these days when God is so largely brought into disrepute, and when men even try to crowd Him out of His own world by means of His own works! He shall have his compensation when the veiled and struggling Cause shall throw off its disguise, and the Master, with flashing crown and scepter shall publicly travel in the greatness of His strength.

Bind yourself out to this great, and good, and best service. If there is any indenture stronger than all others, put to it your hand and seal. Now is the time for signing. Now great situations are being offered. By all means promptly accept them. Not so much that God needs your services as that you need to serve. You need the honor and the profit of it; you need the salvation and the everlasting righteousness of it. Who will accept that collar of gold which is also the badge of the highest nobility in the kingdom of God?

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VI.

HIS GREAT LAW.

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VI.

HIS GREAT LAW.

MORE stress is laid in the Scriptures on some Divine commands than on others. Some are given in more emphatic and pressing words. Some are repeated more often. Some are hedged about with graver penalties. Some have, as it were, an index finger pointing at them from the margin, or an exclamation point overtopping them from behind; are led or followed by a *Behold*, or by a *Verily, verily, I say unto you*, or by a *He that hath ears to hear let him hear*, while others appear in less rousing forms of statement.

"Master, which is the *great* commandment of the law?" The answer of Jesus to this question fully recognizes this distinction of greater and less among the Divine Commands. Those of the first table are compared with those of the second, and are said to hold the first place. That supreme love to God which briefly expresses all our duties to Him is a matter of greater importance

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than that disinterested love to men which briefly expresses all our duties to them. Each is a noble, but one is of a higher order of nobility than the other. If one is dukely the other is princely. The traveler finds a mountain range dividing a continent, piercing the sky with its invisible summits, gathering showers and rivers for the plains below, and garnishing its green slopes with the beauties, sublimities, and fruits of all climates: and from this prodigious sweep of Andes he sees jutting out a single spur of green pastoral hills. In the sight of God the one is the law, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and mind, and strength, and the other is the law, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Do we know how great God is? Do we know how small man is! Let the worth, the dignity, the splendor, the might, the duration, of the One be placed in one scale of a balance; and man, with all he has and is, and can be *supposed* to be or to have, in the other — say, is there an equilibrium? Is there a feather, even, in the human part of those scales? God is the object of the first table of the law, man the object of the second. The one proposes to guard the interests of an infinite Being — the other to guard the inter-

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ests of a number of worms. Put all our human interests together and they are a mere bubble compared with those Heavenly Andes, the interests of God; and he who attempts to crush the bubble commits a very small fault as compared with him who tries to overturn the mountain.

Other things being equal, the command that comes to us with the most impressive clearness and authority is plainly the one which we shall be most to blame for neglecting. A haze of question and discussion has always hung about the second table; but the meaning and reasonableness of the first are two magnificent intuitions to all theists. Among those who refuse to entertain an angel, those are the most guilty to whom his angelic character is most plain; and if there is some one to whom the celestial visitor shows himself without that mask of human flesh and dress in which he appears to others, and his starry hair and golden plumage flash in unveiled magnificence on the sight, then that is the man whose rude *Begone* shall most anger Heaven.

The virtue that has God for its object is the *root-virtue.* As every tree has its root containing in itself the essential character of the whole tree; as every stalk of grain came from a seed that in-

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cluded in itself the essential nature of the whole plant; so religion has a certain radical and elementary religion from which all other parts take their rise. This first instalment and source of religion is piety. Religion never begins in the second table — never begins in morality. The first form of goodness noticed in men is a going forth of the soul toward *God* in a seeking, humble, repentant, way. "Against *Thee* have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." Fellowmen and their sphere are, at this stage, altogether in the background. God and His offended majesty stooping to a reconciliation with His creature is the great object in the field of view. And then, just as soon as the soul has settled into right relations toward Him who is the great center and pivot of religion, these right relations Godward begin to sprout into all manner of right relations manward. He who loves God will love his brother also. Morality always follows and grows out of piety, and it never grows out of anything else. It is true that there are many instances of what is *called* morality which are not led or accompanied, or even followed, by anything that can be called piety. But such morality is not the thing meant in this second table of the Law. It

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is merely the outside of it. The shell contains no kernel — the body no soul.

But why assert the superiority of the first table — why endeavor to prove it? Because it is a matter having large practical bearings; because to lose sight of it, as is very often done, is to hide from our souls the worst part of their sinfulness, the nature of religion, and the mode of gaining it. To hear the talking and to read the writing of many persons, one would suppose that man is the only being in the universe — at least the only one with whom we have any concern. They know of no goodness but honesty, industry, neighborliness, perhaps something that passes for philanthropy. Amid all their praise of such things, not a word, or but a word, falls from them in behalf of fear, love, and obedience toward their Maker. Morality is the beginning, middle, and end of their Gospel. As lecturers, as preachers, as conversationalists, philanthropy is never out of their mouths, and piety is never in them. But why speak of these when almost every worldly man one meets, forgets, or has never yet learned, that our duties to our fellow-men are but a small part of our duties, and thinks that when he has shown himself outwardly moral he has gone triumphantly

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through all the commandments! Overlooking the fact that there is a first table of the law as well as a second, and that this first table is by far the most important of the two, he thinks himself hardly sinner enough to be called to repentance, much less to be plied with threats of complete destruction. With this oversight, religion to him is nothing more, at the most, than an increase in the quality and number of his moralities; a carrying somewhat further the manward sort of excellence which he supposes himself already to possess, rather than a radical reformation of character and relations with reference to *God*. And should he attempt to gain this mistaken sort of religion, it would be altogether in the natural way, instead of the supernatural; having nothing to do with a Mediator, and nothing with faith, and nothing with prayer, and nothing with the Holy Ghost. What a calamity to fall into this threefold pit! How dreadful to think himself a small sinner when he is a great one; to think conversion is what it is not, and to seek salvation by means which can never obtain it! Hence the importance of calling attention to the fact that the second table of the law is the *second* table; that it is neither the whole of the commandment nor the chief part of it; that our

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duties to God have a mighty primacy in dignity and consequence over those we owe to our fellow-men ; and that though one should embellish himself with every conceivable propriety of behavior and disposition toward the members of his own family, and toward his own neighbor, and toward his own countrymen, and toward all the race to which he belongs, he would still, if making no account of his obligation to the Supreme Being, be a most depraved and deformed object in the view of Heaven, and altogether unworthy to be called a religious man.

In speaking thus I do not wish to carry the idea that duties toward man are not of great importance. They *must* be done. We cannot enter Heaven — can scarcely inhabit earth — without them. They are the charm of this world; the foliage of its trees, the grass of its plains, the flowers of its gardens, and the cheery gleam and song of its running waters. It is only when they are compared with duties toward God, that we can venture to speak of them as being small. But in that connection we are bound so to speak of them. So far from being out of place, this way of speaking is Scriptural, and even necessary, considering how strongly the current of tenden-

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cies in society is toward an exalting of morality at the expense of piety. And so I have sought to remind you that man-duties are but dwarfs by the side of God-duties; that the green pastoral mountain we admire is but a fertile spur and avalanche from the great continental Andes of religion; that what the royal sun is to the greenness, smiles, and fruitage of a landscape, such is piety to morality — all beautiful, but the one the cause of the others, and above them by a whole radius of the heavens.

Does it seem to us that we are not great sinners? The current language of Scripture and religious persons about the sinfulness of men — does it seem inapplicable, at least, to ourselves; and do we set it down as a sort of sacred hyperbole? If so, our views stand in pressing need of correction. Our mistake probably comes largely from want of duly considering what is the *great* commandment of the law. We look at what seem our respectable lives manward; and, forgetting the broad, far-stretching field of our duties Godward, we indulge our hearts in the idea that we are rather subjects for commendation than for censure. What a delusion! Our great defects and sins lying in that field of which God is the

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special center, and on which our backs are turned, are invisible to us, and so we know not the plague of our own hearts, but think ourselves very well-to-do religiously, while really we are poor and wretched and blind and naked. Have we such a notion of religion as resolves it, for all practical and every-day purposes, into little more than morality? Are we apt to call men good just as soon as we see them dealing with considerable fairness and kindness with men, and before we have asked whether they are dealing fairly and kindly with God? Then we have an idea which we must alter — *must* alter. Let us mistake the nature of anything else — let us call the tree an idea, or the star a lamp, or the poison best food, — but let us not mistake the nature of religion. The fact is we have insensibly turned our backs on the first table of the law, and so to us a God has dropped out of the commandments. Nothing but *man*, MAN, is visible above our horizon. And so it has come to pass that all virtue seems to point and gesture and speak toward the visible persons and homes and governments of this world.

Ah, friend, this will never do! Such an attitude is simply monstrous. Like Satan himself, it

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is the father of lies, and must in the end become the father of destructions. To think of GOD being overlooked — and overlooked in favor of men! O Soul, awake and spring to thy feet! Turn round a full half circle. Look upward instead of horizontally. Bring thy face to front thy Maker and that Great Commandment which, with shaded eyes and glowing face, stands gazing into the heavens. Then shalt thou have a juster view of the nature of religion: and instead of thinking that men may reach it by improving their morality a little, or considerably, thou shalt realize the need of a radical change of character.

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VII.

THIS LAW BROKEN.

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VII.

THIS LAW BROKEN.

WHEN a man is accustomed to blaspheme God; to denounce religion as an imposture; to violently assail the public morals, as some do without calling themselves infidels; then he can have no doubt that he is a breaker of the first and great commandment. He does not love God as much as he can. He does not love Him at all. He even has a real hostility of heart toward Him. The bitter feeling is so great and mastering, that he can no more doubt its existence than he can that of the mountain which keeps him half of the day in its shadow.

Happily most persons among us are not of this sort. If they are at heart opposed to God, the feeling is so moderate in degree or so covered up by circumstances, that it easily escapes notice. Some of them have no difficulty in seeing that they do not positively love God. They can even be readily brought to see that the general course of their conduct is hostile to His interests. But

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when they come to be charged with having in their hearts a *positive aversion* to Him, it is no easy matter for them to allow the justice of the charge. What! *they* bear ill-will against their Maker! They cannot believe it. They are conscious of no such feeling. It is true they are no saints — this they have never claimed — but as to being at heart positively hostile to religion and its Author, in even the least degree, they are almost certain this cannot be. Yet so it is. Deep down in that mysterious heart of theirs, there is lurking something, which, when proper tests are applied to it, will turn out to be a young viper of the same sort with that which, full-grown in the heart of Satan, with flaming eyes and erected fang, hisses hatred and defiance at the Person and Government of God.

What shall be done to this secret enemy? Shall it be allowed to hide itself till it becomes old and large enough to give a mortal wound? Or, shall a friendly finger be raised to point out the foe to his astonished entertainer, and show the basilisk eye, the terrible head, and the already well-started fang? Surely common humanity demands the last. For, however much he may wish it, your friend cannot himself stretch forth

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his hand in silence and suddenly throw out the deadly reptile which is nestling and growing deep down in your heart. This, under God, must be your own work. Friends can show the enemy — yourself must cast him out.

Where is the spear of Ithuriel, whose touch reveals the secret Satan? How shall we set the lenses and mirrors of illustration so as to cast a strong light on the young viper in that hiding-place where he is daily making some advance to a terrible maturity?

Consider by what signs the smaller degrees of hostile feeling toward a *man* are accustomed to show themselves. If one finds all these signs spotting his relation to God, he must allow himself an enemy at heart of the Divine Person and Government.

When you have taken up ill-will against a neighbor *it is unpleasant to think of him.* Perhaps, sometime, you are having a flow of pleasant thoughts, and, unconsciously, your face opens and brightens to their music: then, if the idea of that neighbor comes suddenly to you, what a chill! How your face sinks away from its geniality! Perhaps you give up a day to special enjoyment: instead of welcoming the idea of him to your

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holiday, do you not do your best to keep it away as that holiday's enemy?

I ask, Do you know of anything like this in your attitude toward God? Is it distasteful to think of Him? Do you avoid it as often as you well can, and when you cannot, do you receive the intruder slowly and reluctantly, and send it away quickly and with a sense of relief? Does the thought of Him go to dampen your enjoyment? Is He one whom to recollect often in a day of pleasure would be to turn it into a day of gloom? The minister of the Gospel — does he find it a harder task to fix your mind on God than the advocate of some vanity does to get your attention to his bubble? The smallest trifle and even vacuity itself — is this welcomed as a shelter against a sense of your Maker? Do you hastily crowd away such a sense when it comes, by pleasure, by business, by society, by whatever you can use for that purpose? Then surely you have one of the signs of a heart averse to God.

When you have taken up ill-will against your neighbor, *you are inclined to avoid his society.* It does not please you to make one of a company to which he is invited. Perhaps you will stay away from it solely on his account. His house you are

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reluctant to enter; perhaps you do not even care to pass it, unless to do so is a matter of very decided convenience. If you see him coming, your sudden impulse is to cross to the other side; perhaps you will even turn into another street to avoid meeting him.

I ask, Is there anything like this in your attitude toward God? The Sabbath is that green spot in time which is His special haunt. He gives it more of His presence than is allowed to all the other days of the week. Is this day, in its character as a religious day, distasteful to you? Of course it is welcome to you as a day of rest; and, if you are accustomed to seek your own pleasure on it, you welcome as a day of self-indulgence; but what I ask is, Do you welcome it as a day of *religious* exercises. — The sanctuary is that green spot in space which is God's special haunt. He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Is the house of God, in its character as a religious building, distasteful to you? Of course it is agreeable as a place where acquaintances can be seen, opinions interchanged, and the whole community pass in review in its most attractive dress; but what I ask is, Do you like it as a place of *religious* exercises? — The

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closet is another of God's favorite places. How feel you toward that prayer which is communion with God? Is it something which you pass altogether? If not, do you submit to it as a burden which you have been taught to bear from childhood and so must not omit? Then surely you have another sign of a heart opposed to God. Then surely you are disinclined to His society — would like to avoid the places and companies where you would be most likely to meet Him. You have the impulse to turn the corner when you see Him coming — to fetch a circuit about His house lest you see something to remind you of Him.

When you have taken up ill-will against a neighbor, *you are disposed, in case of any contest between him and others, to cast your sympathies on the side of his opponents.* You do not need to inquire and find that his arguments are the weakest, if it is merely a case of intellectual dispute. Your heart starts up and takes side against him, quite in advance of any movement of your reason. Very likely your heart softly and unconsciously draws your reason after it. You do not need to inquire and find that he has not justice on his side, if it is a case before the courts.

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Your impulses declare against him before the witnesses are examined and the judge gives the law. You do not need to inquire and find that he is the aggressor, if it is that more common case of social strife which contents itself with appealing to the bar of public opinion. Your prejudices take the stand and begin to testify against him before the case is fairly called from the docket.

And now I ask, Do you have to confess a similar treatment of God? He has His controversies. He is at issue with the world on the ground of truth, on the ground of law, and on the ground of natural equity. For example, He maintains that religion is the best policy; the world maintains the contrary. He claims that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things he possesses; the world claims the contrary. He will have it that forgiveness is better than retaliation, liberality for religious objects better than spare giving, the honor that comes from God better than that coming from man; the world will have it that just the contrary is true. I ask, On which side in this dispute do your sympathies place themselves? — There is also a case before the chancery of Heaven in which God is the complainant and worldly people the defendants. He charges that

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they have treated Him in such a way as to make them vastly guilty in the eye of the law and deserving of vast punishment. They plead not guilty. A very inoffensive and respectable body of people are they: not perfect indeed, but far from being such monsters that in them there dwells no good thing. I ask, On what side in this suit do your sympathies at once take stand? — God is at issue with worldly men, too, on another ground. He claims that He is an injured being in view of natural equity and common humanity. They, on the contrary, really look on Him as the aggressor. Does He not disturb them continually with the outcries of His messages, utter most unpleasant commands, threaten most harsh punishments, embitter by His interferences all comfort in the courses they wish to take? In this controversy, too, in what direction flow out your partialities? Before your judgment has had chance to interpose, does your heart pronounce in favor of the world? Does the world, instead of God, have the support of your instincts, your tendencies, your impulses, whatever the points in dispute between the two parties? Then surely you have another sign of a heart averse to God.

When you have taken up ill-will against your

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neighbor, *you feel a distaste for his works.* If you fall in with a letter written by him, at once the bitterness within you asks leave to turn your back upon it. The addresses he makes, the plans he lays, the statements he pens of his sentiments and designs, are all met at the very threshold with disfavor. You may not openly cavil; but the inward sourness bids you be on the outlook for faults, and blind to merits. You may not roughly neglect; but it is more or less of a trial to attend.

And now, I ask, Is there anything like this in your treatment of God? The Bible is His letter. The Bible is His conversation and formal oration. The Bible is the record of His sentiments, plans, and doings. Have you any disrelish for this book? Is it self-denial for you to read it? Are your readings few and captious? Not many shrink from the splendid literature of parts of the Holy Book: do you shrink from it as a book of *religion?* Do you disrelish other books which are grounded on the sacred writings, and which have for their object to illustrate and recommend those writings! Then surely we may count you as having still another sign of a heart opposed to God. And were we unable to carry our inquiry

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any further, it would still be plain that you hold a place, at least on their outskirts, among those who wave banners and shake spears against the Most High. You have their spirit in quality, if not in degree.

When you have ill-will against your neighbor, *you are apt to disrelish such as interest themselves warmly in his favor.* Their zeal identifies them with him. In time they come to excite in you the same sort of feeling. It is plain they are ready to oppose, in some form, all who oppose him: and this your heart silently recognizes as the same thing as being ready to oppose you. They speak much and highly of him: and what is this but a much rasping of your sore heart, a much resisting of the current of your wishes and partialities, a much condemnation of yourself? They stand up for his rights, they help him in his plans, they treat his interests as if they were their own: what does your bitter heart take this to be but a proclamation against yourself? So you naturally come to feel a repugnance to their society and persons, and to feel drawn toward those whose sympathies are more like your own.

And again I ask, How stand you affected to-

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ward the devoted friends of God — how toward those who treat Him with indifference and neglect? Is there a conscious shrinking from the one class, and a conscious inclination toward the other? Is the society of the one irksome, and that of the other a liberty? To see *those*, feeling and speaking and working for God as if they were one with Him, does this jar on your feelings — to see *these*, feeling and speaking and working for the world as if one with it, does this refresh you like native breezes? Then surely I may still hold fast to my refrain, and call on you to confess that you have still another sign of a heart averse to God. The ship is becoming flecked all over with signals that she carries the enemy beneath her quiet decks. It is getting to be very plain that what hides in your heart is really a viper.

When you have ill-will against a neighbor, *you are uneasy at seeing signs of his prosperity, and find it not ungrateful to see signs of his adversity.* Are his meadows green? Do great sheaves stand thickly on his harvest ground? Does every year add fertile acres to his domain, flocks to his laughing pastures, and beauty to his home? With that ill-will in your heart, this appearance of thrift is far from lighting up your

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face with pleasure. It becomes clouded as you look. The whole scene breathes discontent upon you. You get a sensible relief when you can turn your eyes away to other estates in which he has no interest. And let there come a reverse to those prospering affairs — let the marks of decay succeed to those of thrift, the herds dwindle from the hills, the ever lessening crops betray the wasting land, the buildings begin to speak to all who pass them of their owner's embarrassments, then your inward bitterness is in accord with the outward scene — then you can look on it without pain, and even detect the beginnings of a grim satisfaction, as your eye wanders over the decaying landscape.

And still again I ask, Is there anything like this in the feelings awakened by your view of the prosperity and adversity of God? For He, too, has His prosperity and adversity. The one is when religion flourishes. Now good men are vigilant, spiritual, and active. Now sinners are turned away from sin in large numbers. In short, we have a genuine revival of religion. Does the idea of such a revival make you uneasy? Would it be somewhat disagreeable should you find there is a prospect of such an event in your own neigh-

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borhood? Do you shrink from it with conscious, if not large, aversion? And yet revivals, *real* revivals, are the green tracts, the weighty harvests, and enlarging domain of the Great Proprietor. — But He has His unprosperous times also. How stand you affected at the sight and thought of *them?* Does a gleam of satisfaction shoot athwart you when you hear that a Christian professor has done what makes to the disadvantage of religion? Do you like to hear and believe hard things respecting the character and conduct of the church at large? At the bottom of your heart, would you prefer to have that church sleeping rather than waking, worldly rather than spiritual, inactive rather than active: and to have the community generally gay, careless, and almost drowned in the worldly and God-forgetting spirit? Then you relish seeing God in waning circumstances. For, here you have His house out of repair, His flocks failing from their pastures, His fields themselves pining away under drought and misconduct of laborers. And surely if it touches you with a shade of sorrow to see signs of His prosperity, and with a gleam of satisfaction to see the signs of His adversity, you must confess that you have yet an-

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other sign of a heart hostile to Him. May I not now say that the probabilities have gathered into the sufficient proof that within your heart lives a dreadful serpent; in essential nature, if not in size, like that which in Satan hisses hatred at the person and goverment of God?

Enmity to God! Can it be that this young viper lies coiled up in your bosom, cherished by its warmth, fed by its circulation, and daily showing a keener eye and a more active movement? Even so. Partly covered up by a variety of things, and as yet not very readily made out by the eye amid the shadows and covers of its hiding-place, but revealing itself to certain tests with much clearness! The lineal descendant of the very serpent that stung to death Christ and His prophets long ago; and which, if time enough is given it, will come to all the venom and malignant activity of its ancestor! A mere worm at present, but gradually finding its way to size and terribleness, and, unless smitten and killed, sure at last to open a wound in your bosom beyond the reach of the healing art! You were not aware of the infant monster. So it was not unnatural that you should feel at ease. But now that you see him fairly domesticated in your bosom,

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does it not seem to you a frightful thing? What, discover a true viper, living within you, and occasionally showing himself at your mouth, and yet not be dismayed and take measures with trembling promptitude to cast him out! Can it be that you are inconsiderate enough to say that it will be some time yet ere the reptile will be large enough to give a mortal wound; and that so there is no need for present concern and haste! Who has told you just the day and the hour when he will be ready to strike the fang into your vein? I am not sure that he will not be able to do it to-morrow. He is moving now. See, he is brandishing his tongue and giving his warning hiss! Wait for no to-morrow. You may find it no easy matter, though you set about it presently, to detach the enemy from his nestling place, and project him sheer out of you. But he is daily working deeper. Every year sees him embrace the roots of your being with a new fold. What success will attend an effort to dislodge him years hence neither you nor I can say. If you are disposed to do something *at once* in your behalf, there is one very important suggestion to be made as to the mode. Instead of calling to your aid some forceps of human contrivance, and with that en-

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deavoring to draw out with your own hand the reluctant and slippery foe, remember that he is as much the foe of God as of yourself. Go to Him and submit your heart confidingly to the manipulations of His unexampled skill. He can relieve you of that dangerous inmate. He will not refuse to do it. He has already taken the pest from many a heart — suffer Him to add yours to the number. And when the work is done, and the enemy lies lifeless at your feet in the light of day, with all the marks of his deadly race upon him, you will be convinced that your alarm was not excessive, nor your action premature.

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VIII.

YET MOST REASONABLE.

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VIII.

YET MOST REASONABLE.

THE entire reasonableness of that part of the Divine Law which relates to external conduct is easily seen. Thou shalt not bow down to idols, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness — who feels entitled to complain, even in thought, of such commands as these? All see at a glance that what is required is both good and possible.

Not so, however, when God takes it upon Him to demand the *affections of our hearts.* At once questions and difficulties begin to arise. "Can a man love by merely choosing to love? Can I put off inborn relishes and disrelishes as one does his garment — when it suits my convenience? And then the idea of *compelling* attachment — of calling for it in tones of authority, with Sinaitic thunders and threat of giant penalty! Is not this just the way to make the sentiment impossible to such beings as we are, even if we were naturally disposed to welcome it?"

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So the heart is very apt to inquire and reason. And perhaps *you* have had such thoughts, or the shadows of them, though you have never given expression to them in words; are troubled by them as being so many accusations against God and so many arguments against yourself; are discouraged by them from attempting, at least with hopefulness and vigor, to exercise the love required. If so, allow me to give you some reasons for thinking that love to God is as voluntary a thing as honesty of the hands or truthfulness of the lips, as a church-going or alms-giving; and therefore can as reasonably be made a matter of command.

You enter your neighbor's house. There dwell the best parents you ever knew — so gentle, so wise, so disinterested, so good in all respects, that you never saw their equals. While waiting for them to appear, what more natural than to call their little son to your knee, and, after soothing his shyness and gaining his ear by speaking of his playmates and books, to proceed to tell him that he must be a good child, and mind his parents, and *love* them very much? Are you in earnest? Do you really mean what you say? Here you are bidding the child to love his parents, and it

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does not once occur to you that you are doing anything unreasonable. You think it one of the most proper things to be said to him. And you are not alone in the thought. I think so. Everybody thinks so. Even the child has nothing to object; nor does he raise an eye of astonishment to your face as if he had been required to lift a house or touch the stars. He *can* love his most excellent parents if he chooses to do it. And why may he not in the same way, whatever that way may be, come to love his Heavenly Father? Do you say there are difficulties in the one case which do not exist in the other — that the child has a natural alienation from God, but a natural tendency toward his parents? Very true; and this does indeed make it likely that more effort will be needed to secure the Divine than the human affection. It shows nothing beyond this. Are things to which there is a natural obstruction necessarily beyond the power of the will? Do we not often see natural dislikes to certain kinds of employment, of food, of social customs, overcome by dint of strong and persevering willing? Demosthenes had from the beginning his defect of speech: did not his stubborn will at last find out a way to remove it? Some are born with harsh

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tempers: is it an unheard of thing for such men to subdue their tempers? No, the fact that there is a tendency away from God in us only shows that there is labor in store for us if we choose to move toward Him. Just as an innate gravitation of his whole body downward does not keep the bird from rising toward the sun, or the aeronaut from shooting up like an arrow into the glorious blue — so the natural gravitation of our hearts away from love to God need not keep us away from that great attainment.

But some one will have it that the two cases widely differ. "The Scriptures," he says, "not only teach that aversion of the human heart to God is native, but also that it is so deep-seated and powerful that nothing short of a Divine power will take it away." True, our depravity is so strong that without the help of God we shall never love Him. But every good and perfect gift is from above — every desirable feeling must come to us through Divine hands. It is even true of that love which you were just now bidding the child have to his parents. If he follows your counsel, it is sure to be by a heavenly persuading and enabling. His is just the case of one who has to gain love to God. Neither will

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love without God: and yet both will love, if they at last come to that point, as a result of their own voluntary action. The two things are perfectly consistent with each other. Cannot God prompt, and help carry into effect, free human choices? Man can do as much — why not man's Maker? The child, in the circumstances in which he is placed and with such helps as the Spirit and Providence of God are sure to afford him, can, by the use of his voluntary powers, come, even from deep estrangement of heart, to love most tenderly those excellent parents whose worth is the pride of their neighborhood and an ornament to human nature. And so the sinner, in his circumstances and with such aids as Divine grace has gathered about him, can by his own free efforts come to stifle in himself aversion, and kindle in its room a deep, tender, beautiful love toward that perfect Father above of whose greatness and goodness all that is great and good among men is only a pigmy shadow. This result cannot, indeed, be had in a moment by the simple choice of it: nor can the estranged child at once set up his parents in his heart by simply willing to do so. I cannot stand and say to my heart, "Love thou God;" and at once the beauty of that dear grace flush up the

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firmament of my soul as a familiar wonder did a few evenings ago the northern heavens with its arches of triumph, and highways of angels, and soft waving streamers of glory. But what of that? Does it follow that the blessing does not lie within the scope of my voluntary powers? Because the author cannot will his book into being after the manner in which God made the light, does it follow that he cannot write the book if he chooses? Because the builder cannot make a house by simply saying in the depths of his determining faculty, "Let the house appear," does it follow that he cannot ply axe and hammer and plane until the building is done? By pieces the work can be done — the foundation laid, the beams hewn, the frame raised, and so on, step by step, till at last a stately mansion adorns the landscape. He has wrought with his own hands; he has perhaps called in the work of others still more strong and skillful: and when, the last stroke given, he stands off and surveys the great and comely structure, he feels (does he not) that it is the product of his own will. So may we feel, if by any voluntary process and by any aids voluntarily bespoken, we succeed in building up within ourselves the palace of Love to God It stands there by our

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choice ; it is the answer made by our wills to the command, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."

That a thing can be done is often best proved by showing *how* it can be done. It so happens that I can add this most satisfactory proof to my argument. I can point out the steps of a voluntary process by which a man may philosophically and Scripturally build up within himself the commanded love to God. Let him begin with *prayer* for the blessing. This is the Bible way of beginning all good enterprises. And it is the philosophical way too ; for, plainly, there is no being who can do so much to help an undertaking, of whatever sort, as God. He knows how to inspire courage and perseverance, how to enlighten the judgment, how to arrange circumstances so as to further the end in view. Suppose the problem is to love Him. Is not this an undertaking He approves ? Does He not know the deepest and most secret springs of the affections — all about the ways and means of reaching and working the will which He Himself made and whose history He has watched from its beginning ? By all means send your disordered instrument to the artist who contrived and made it, if you would have it put into good condition. Cannot God

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easily put Himself into such sweet and glorious points of view to us as we might strive years for in vain if left to ourselves? Certainly He will not be offended if we ask Him to help us love Him; and who can say that it may not be proper for Him to do on request what it would not be proper for Him to do without? So reason bids us go to Him at the outset: bids it even before she has heard Moses promise Israel that God would circumcise their heart to love the Lord their God; and heard Paul pray that God would direct the hearts of the Thessalonians into the love of God, or assert that the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. But now that the surer Teacher has thus plainly spoken, and we learn that to kindle up the soul into a personal attachment to Himself is a sort of work that God actually engages in; and further, that prayer for His aid at this point is a fitting and most serviceable thing; surely the way cannot be clearer. Call in aid from abroad — from that greatest abroad which is above. Contrary to the proverb which you have been hearing from childhood, depend *not* on your own resources, but in this matter take hold of the resources of the great Helper. This is the first step in that voluntary movement

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which is to establish God in your hearts. Does anybody doubt that a sincere asking for God's help is fully within the power of our wills?

Next, *submit unreservedly to God as a moral and providential governor.* This is a splendid step toward loving Him. Our successes and reverses, our comforts and trials, the whole checkered scene of our state in this world, are in His hand. Whatever be the reluctance of our hearts, we can say to Him (giving consent to be taken at our word beyond the power of recall), "Thou art all-wise and all-good; we are ignorant and sinful; we consent to have thy Providence send us such events and conditions, painful or pleasing, as shall seem to Thee to be most for Thy glory and our final good." This is submission to God as a Providence. But we need to submit to Him in another character. He has given us a written code of laws. And, whatever be the reluctance of our hearts, our wills possess the power, with such help as God gives, of adopting these laws as the rule of life — possess the power of solemnly pledging ourselves that with the help of Divine grace we will endeavor at the doing of all the commandments, from the greatest to the least, easy or difficult, now and ever. This done, we have submitted to

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God as a Moral Governor. Our submission is now complete. We have cast away our rebellion and accepted the government of God in all its parts. Now, I ask, what would be the practical bearing of such a step as this on our feelings toward God. Look at some little child for an answer. He has for days been wayward. His heart is bitter to the parents who have crossed his will, and have labored with reproof and rod to guide and restrain him. His eye is cold upon them; he does not wish to speak to them. He keeps out of their disagreeable presence as much as he can. But at last, one day, under the pleadings of love or the smartings of chastisement, his better nature awakes within him. After perhaps many a struggle, he bows his stubborn will. He says to his father, "I have done wrong; I am sorry for it; I mean to do so no more; I will try to do all you bid, and to behave so as to please you in all things." In a word he *submits*. Does his heart rise up against his good parents now? Does he still shun them and keep word and face in sullenness? You know how it is — clouds broken up and a burst of sunshine! All his sourness gone, never has he seemed to love his parents so much. Now is the time, if ever, when his face fairly

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shines on them with affection, and he flings his arms about their necks in unaffected fondness. There is no mystery about it — it is just the natural result of his submission. As soon as the clouds are gone, the sun does his proper work, and the ice melts. As soon as the little rebel gives up his insubordination, his reason, the character of his parents, and his filial instincts produce their appropriate effect, and he loves. Such is the effect of a real submission to God. The enmity of the natural heart at once disappears by a law of Nature, also by a law of grace, and in its stead comes love by the same two-fold law. For, says the Evangelist, "To as many as received Him gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe in His name." So a practical faith in God at once establishes the filial relation and feeling. In many cases this feeling is immediately recognized. How some converts at once glow and burn in love! They could give up all for God's dear sake. They could go to martyrdom joyfully out of love to the Heavenly Father. Such dazzling experiences are far from being universal; but the tide that rises to a flood in some penitent hearts is sure to exist in some degree in all such hearts. The traveler who sees

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the waters heaped up their seventy feet in the Bay of Fundy, knows that the same tidal wave is swelling somewhat on every part of the same meridian, the world around.

I might stop here, as having fairly given a method by which one can gain love to God. Prayer will help him to it; and he will surely have it just as soon as he has thoroughly submitted himself to God. But this love should be *seen* as well as exist. It should burn so brightly in his consciousness that he cannot doubt that he has it. This is what he needs for his fullest satisfaction, and it is what God really requires of him. Suppose it is so weak, or so overlaid by other states of the mind, as to escape notice. Then the man fears that he has not fully submitted. He is in great trouble. He peers into the dark within him with anxious face and extended lantern, but can see nothing. What shall he do? He has prayed; he has tried to submit. Now let him do what every intelligent person would advise a child to do in like circumstances. That child has distinctly confessed and renounced his disobedience; and yet, somehow, he does not feel that glow of filial tenderness which is befitting and which he wants. You would bid him *think* of the many

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excellencies of his parents ; especially think about all their care and love and benefits toward him. What self-denials and toils and expenses they have lavished on him from very birth, and are still ready to lavish! "Keep these things," you would say to him, "much in your thoughts ; and refuse to allow yourself in any harsh, low, unworthy conceptions of these noble parents. Do this, while striving to meet their wishes in everything, and I can promise you that you will soon find your heart growing tender toward them." Who would not call this sound advice? Who would not expect a happy issue in case the advice should be faithfully followed? It is just what every man should take to himself, who, after apparently submitting to God, still fails to see in himself that love to God which he covets. Let him ponder the glorious excellence and supreme beauty of his Heavenly Father. Let him muse often and deeply on the shining justice and loving-kindness, the wonderful long-suffering and immutable faithfulness, the infinite condescension and eternal uprightness of the One Great and Good. Let him keep before his mind what care and benefits and tenderness he has in his own person received at the hands of his Father in

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Heaven from the beginning till now, and oh, what sacrifices have been made for him, what a Gospel has been given him, what a Spirit has waited on him, and what a Heaven is beckoning to him with all its radiant fingers — let this matchless God of the Scriptures be the God of his frequent and earnest thought, and let him refuse to entertain, as being intuitively false, all low and complaining thoughts of Him, while carefully trying to do His will from day to day; and no one need be afraid to warrant that the want of his heart will be met, and that he will see his love to God, perhaps as men see the sun.

This method for attaining a *visible* love to God is unfailing. It is both Scriptural and philosophical. It has been tried ten thousand times with entire success. Do you know, I am not one of those who wonder that there is so little conscious love to God among men. How little time do our most correct people give to thinking of Him! In comparison with worldly matters how small space is allowed Him in our thought! We complain that our hearts are cold, that we greatly fear there is no genuine love in them. Pray, with this manner of treating ourselves and in the name of all that is reasonable, what right have we to look for

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a different state of things? How often do we set ourselves down deliberately to pass in review God's glorious character and deeds? How often, at home or abroad, on sabbath or week-day, is there even a transient hearty effort to conceive of God as He is? Is it at all strange that our hearts should seem like icicles Godward? It were a miracle were it otherwise. When have men crossed the ocean without ships, or grown strong without food? To expect that an invisible being will awaken tenderness, when the thoughts are allowed no opportunity to dwell on what is lovely and admirable in Him, is absurd.

I trust you see the entire reasonableness of the command to love God. Any man can have this love who chooses. Any man who chooses can consciously have it. Not perhaps in the way he chooses; perhaps not as easily nor as suddenly nor as independently as he would like; but still in a way every step of which lies fully within the scope of his will. He can call in Divine power. He can wholly submit to God. He can keep his mind familiar with the Divine perfections. And it can safely be put to his conscience whether it is not reasonable that he should be *called on* to do what is plainly so important to be done. We

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ought to love God without being required to do it; nay, it is nothing less than monstrous that so glorious a being should be obliged to seek by statute what ought to seek Him as the mountain torrent seeks the plain. But since it is clear, from the slowness with which we are roused to any sort of religious effort under the existing goads of statutes and penalties, that we would never be roused without such goads, let us thank God that He has not withheld them, but says amid the thunders of the mount, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*"

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IX.

CONSEQUENT GUILT.

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IX.

CONSEQUENT GUILT.

SOME bodies have large measures of a subtle force which we call electric. This force tends to flow out to certain other bodies. But insulation often happens. The electrically charged substance becomes surrounded with non-conductors, and neither gives nor receives the darting currents. Perhaps, not far away, is some magnificent battery all filled to overflowing with the bright leaping forces, and ready to discharge them freely, could only some bridge of communication be established. But there is no overleaping the dead, unsympathizing glass between. We have an island cut off from the main-land by breadths of sea, across which no laded ships of intercourse as yet have learned to pass and repass.

In our natural state we are insulated in regard to God. Our affections, our purposes, even our thoughts, do not flow out readily toward Him. There is between the two some non-conducting medium. And it is a medium which sorely hin-

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ders the outflow of Divine love and kindly purpose and thought on us. We are islands cut off from our main-land. We are an offense to God and God is no pleasure to us. His will and glory are not the great object we have in view; nor do His purposes favor our happiness and advancement. We think of Him seldom and with reluctance; and He never thinks of us approvingly. We do not ask what He would have us do; and He does not concern Himself with what we would have Him do — save in the way of disapproving, rebuking, and punishing. The alienation is mutual.

But I am now most concerned with that part of the alienation which belongs to man. Sometimes natural men find it hard to see, what yet is undoubtedly true, that just views of God are repulsive to their tastes, and that their true feeling toward Him is of the nature of hostility. But it is never very hard to convict them to their own consciousness of *alienation* from their Maker — of standing one side from Him, of having no communion with Him and no particular taste for any, of general indifference to His person and cause, of rarely or never consulting His wishes — in drafting plans and prosecuting enterprises. A few moments of reflection are enough. They are

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convinced that if they are not against God, they are certainly *without* Him in the world. Their hearts, when candidly questioned, say, God is not in us. Their business and their pleasure, when fairly put to their testimony, say, And God is not in us. The charge is not that the needle of their life, both outer and inner, does not settle firmly in the direction of God but wavers about many degrees from side to side: it is that neither heart nor conduct has any polarity whatever toward Him, that both feeling and doing make no account of Him — of His wishes, interests, commands. And the charge is proven in the consciousness of each sinner as soon as made. He knows that his life as a whole has been, not an answer to the question, *What wilt Thou have me to do?* — but rather answers to the questions, *What will people think of it? Will it be for my worldly interest or pleasure?* He knows, further, that his ruling tastes have pointed away from religious duties and employments; that Bible-reading and prayer and religious meditation have been irksome; that it is with a sense of relief he takes leave of sabbaths, revivals, godly books, godly conversation, and all things flavored with the idea of God. This bespeaks at least godlessness.

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I wish now to speak of the *great guilt* of this state. The men who would be shocked at a positive hatred of God and active hostility to Him as being a dreadful crime, and who stoutly deny that such crime can be justly charged on them, will generally admit their simple alienation, without any sense that they are at the same time admitting their "desperate wickedness." The practical impression is that letting God alone is a small sin. You cannot fight against Him without sinning capitally, but you can live apart from Him, neglect Him, have nothing to do with Him, and yet do nothing very bad. Look around. Behold the great mass of men alienated (confessedly so in their own consciousness), and yet unconvicted and unabashed, and not seldom trusting in their blamelessness for acceptance with Heaven! These men have a great lesson to learn. Not that simple alienation is as bad as hostility, but that even the milder offense is dark-faced enough, when fairly seen, to disturb conscience to its lowest depths.

"*What is the first and great commandment?*" O lawyer and tempter, surely it is this, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind! Does he

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only break this chief command who hates God, and in a spirit of hatred makes outrageous war upon Him? As truly is it done by him who merely stands aloof from his Creator. His heart is indifferent, his will habitually makes no account of the Divine, his whole life proceeds in a spirit of independence and self-pleasing. See how he leaves the empire-commandment undone! See how wholly he sacrifices it by neglecting to love with any part of his soul — it being all pure separation from God, whether we look at feelings, choosings, or doings. A great sin is that which sacrifices the most fundamental and sacred of the commandments.

What does God *deserve* at our hands, from the stand-point of mere reason? I see Him passing wonderful in His eternal, almighty, and all-knowing nature — I see Him an actually reigning monarch in heaven and earth, in hight and depth and all things — I see Him reigning in matchless union of perfect love and perfect justice, with more than a father's heart bearing the firm hand of an incorruptible magistrate — in a word, I see Him the sum of all that is great and lovely and fearful. Tell me, O my best judgment, what such a Being deserves at my hands! Is He to be left

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out of account? Does it belong to the fitness of things to read this infinite quantity as a mere cipher? Is there nothing here urging me to ponder, to admire, to love, to fear, to obey? The wonder is how neglect of such a being is possible to men who have the least faculty for seeing things as they are. Every principle of reason demands of us that God be the great idea of every day, the ruling passion whether as hope or fear, the generic plan and work which wall in our entire lives. O alienated man, to whom God is a forgetfulness instead of a remembrance; a zero hidden in the great cave of silence and invisibility, whither no roots of sensibility and enterprise find their way through stony roof in search of the nutritious moisture that has fled the surface — know for certain that you are doing vast violence to the deservings of your neglected Maker. Not a great sinner? Who shall say this — if indeed it is true that alienation from God is no necessity; and that all know, or might know, in some degree how ill-deserved it is!

We can often make sure of the nature of a principle by tracing it to its source. The branches of a tree will have the same juices in them as its root; and if the root is a poison then woe to the

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man who makes food of the branches. Whence comes this alienation from God? You will find, on inquiry of the Bible and a just philosophy, that it all comes from that worst possible and most poisonous root, *a subtle antagonism between the heart and virtue.* A disrelish to religious affections and rules of conduct is grounded in human nature. This is the native depravity and original sin of which theologians speak; and this is really what lies at the bottom of the trouble between us and God. He is the disrelished holiness made pictorial in the form of a Person. So the soul that disrelishes holiness instinctively draws away from Him. Dealings with Him are not welcome — the idea of Him is not welcome — His rules are not welcome. Out of this state misconceptions of God naturally spring. His name grows to be a chill, sometimes a sharp north wind, sometimes even arrows and spears. The whole trouble is born of a secret dislike to goodness. This is the non-conductor that parts between us and the magnificent battery — this the briny stretch that divides our island from its main-land. Were there no repugnance of the soul to religion itself there would be no living without God in the world. The creature and the Creator would come together

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like planet and sun on the removal of the centrifugal force.

When you know what alienation from God is in itself, you have only begun to measure its evil. You need to ask what sort of a *retinue* it has. It will be found that, like many other evil things, it has a large company of other evils in its train. Parley who opens to one robber finds to his dismay that the first has a second and third and — hundreth. If one allows alienation from God to enter his castle, he will find that he has let in both the robber-captain and his whole company. Stand aloof from God and you open to all manner of sin. To be away from Him is to be away from the greatest moral helps, and with Satan and the thick of his temptations. Living without reference to His will is like sailing in obscure seas without reference to chart and compass and star. Is the seaman not sure to make many wrong and unfortunate courses? Alas, the wanderings of the soul that does not sail itself by the will of God! What strange tracks and miserable ventures! It will find its way to archipelagoes of rocks and wrecks. Who reckons the formidableness of an enemy by himself alone? It is himself and *the troops that march behind him* that the wise compu-

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tation looks after. So we should compute the common alienation from God; and when so reckoned it will be found an evil of terrible amount.

In fact this evil is one which, unlike many sins, makes *any degree of true virtue impossible in the subject; and, so as far as it has force as an example, strikes at the root of all virtue in the world.* There are many faults, and even depravities, which permit the existence of virtues side by side with them in the same character. But this depravity is of a quite different order. Nothing of the nature of Christian virtue can dwell with it. Not even a mustard seed of grace can come in till this Satan goes out. It is well known Bible that in men, as they are by nature, "there dwelleth no good thing;" and that the first step out of this good-less state is a change of attitude toward God. The sinner who before looked only down and around on the earthly at last turns his eyes upward to where God sits in the glory of His love and wrath, of His invitations and threatenings and claims. His thoughts gather and strain about that wondrous Personality as they never could about an abstraction. Fears and hopes awaken in His presence. Conscience recognizes her Master and begins to speak. And when at

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length the soul submits to Him, it is in the act of voluntarily drawing nigh. This is its first virtuous act. Were it to keep up its natural alienation it would also keep up its death in trespasses and sins. Not a quiver of true life would ever appear. Galvanic tremors might now and then show themselves; but, mark you, the corpse is a corpse still, and not a feather will move at the breathless lips. Surely we may write a black name over against the evil that makes all goodness impossible; and so, as far as it has force as an example, strikes at the root of all goodness in the world.

Some evils are transient. Almost a single moment sees their beginning and ending. Others continue through months and years. The latter, of course, are the worse class. They are careers of evil instead of single steps. Alienation from God is a long, long evil. It is not one sinful act put forth and finished in the compass of a few moments, but a sinful state of mind prolonged without break through years and years. It is not one pang, but a long disease, close beaded with pangs, staying by us night and day. A life-time, perhaps, is bound up in these cords of affliction. The moral system has no relieved moments in

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which to recover its elasticity. A nightmare that never goes away! To put on God for a few moments a treatment so unlike what He deserves, would be no small wrong; what is it to do it for years on years? To open the door for a little time to all manner of sin is no small evil; what is it to fasten that door ajar for an unlimited thoroughfare of temptation and sin? To shut up a single day to the impossibility of any degree of true virtue, and for that day to strike at the root of all true virtue in the world, is a calamity; what is it to expand that impossibility and that utter assault like a Dead Sea over vast districts which but for it would have been as fair and fertile as the vale of Siddim?

The considerations just stated are not at all hard to be understood. They are such as a little thought and openness of eye would show to all. All actually know them, or should know them; and so should know that alienation (to say nothing of hostility) from God, in its nature, is an evil black as night and bitter as death. And it is not a necessary evil. Smite on both cheeks the philosophy that says it is. By grace of God our wills can triumph over it. As I have shown, there is a way by which men can even triumph over a posi-

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tive enmity to God and put love in its place. They have done it. How much more can they do as against simple alienation? Being thus voluntary, the great evil is a great guilt wherever tolerated. I must call it hard names in order to be just or Scriptural. It is a leprosy, a plague, a viper, a dragon, a Satan. Only it is Satan in the seed. A plenty of development gives us him who set all Heaven aflame with war against the Most High, and then fell like lightning from his sphere.

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X.

THE DIVINE BALANCE.

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X.

THE DIVINE BALANCE.

THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES AND ART FOUND WANTING. What was weighed? Not the riches of Belshazzar. These were very great; he could not have been found wanting in respect to gold and silver and jewels and palaces. Not his station and honor and power. He was a monarch, an absolute monarch, and, at the moment the words were written, hundreds of thousands of lives were at his beck. What was it, then, that was weighed? It was *himself* — his soul, his character, his true self. This was found wanting. The scale in which it was placed sprang swiftly aloft.

I seem to see a Divine Form seated on the clouds and watching, as intently as ever did earthly trader his little scales, the oscillations of a great, shadowy Balance that hangs from His giant hand. In one scale is His law — especially the first and great commandment. In the other is a human soul. And He is seeing how much must

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be added to this last scale to put it in equilibrium with the other. Does that soul weigh nothing, does it weigh something, does it weigh enough to meet the necessities of the case?

Whose soul is that? It is Belshazzar's. It is mine or yours. Nay, who does not get weighed in that august Balance that hangs trembling and glittering among the clouds. Good man — thou art weighed. Bad man — thou art weighed. Ye great, with golden circlets about your brows and purple mantles depending — into that scale ye are cast notwithstanding your greatness. Ye small, without name or glitter or consideration — into that scale ye go notwithstanding your littleness. "The Lord searcheth all hearts." "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." So it is a sure matter that God tries the reins of all the children of men. Never a moment but that great, spiritual Balance among the clouds is trembling with the thoughts and feelings and actions of us all; and is giving forth, flood on flood, its silent decisions.

By no means does yon man *feel* as if now suspended in God's Balance. He is thinking of any-

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thing else. He is contriving certain plans — perhaps none of the most upright. He is carrying into effect certain projects — perhaps in not the most upright ways. And all the while it never enters his thought that he is being poised and estimated, up yonder among the clouds, as truly as any commodity is being weighed out to the buyer in the marts below. Yet so it is. The law in the one scale, the man in the other, and great God bending over the two to see how they compare! Ah, who of us realizes it as he should! Some of us think of it now and then; it forms a part of our confessions of faith; we pronounce a man little better than a heathen who denies it; but really the most of the time we forget the Balance and that we are in it. Quicker than a flash, no sooner is a thought or feeling or intention born to us than it is caught up and cast into the constellation Libra — up there among the stars where it glitters and decides — but we, short-sighted creatures, if we happen to quicken half a dozen times a day to the fact, are thought to be becoming unusually thoughtful and devout. Shut your eyes and the weighing still goes on. Bury yourself ten thousand fathoms deep in worldly cares or thoughtlessness, and still the great weighing goes

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on. Whether we notice it and tremble, or fail to notice it and make merry; we fill our places in the scale all the same. The weight of our bodies is never taken without our being aware of the fact. We feel the touch of the balance. We see the rising and settling of the beam. But here all is invisible; and the Divine Balance up yonder receives us, and the lever swings, and our characters and lives go up or down (perhaps strike the beam with the sudden violence of a thunder clap), and yet perhaps not a ripple of the fact travels to our perception.

None can help being weighed in this unseen Balance. If you do not want your body weighed, weighed it will not be. Say *No* to your friends and neighbors and they will hardly compel you to enter the scale and show them whether your weight is so much, or only so much. Should force be used, you can almost always defeat its object by sudden and various struggles. They cannot weigh you unless you are willing to be weighed. But God can and will — in that soul-weighing Balance of His that glitters and decides among the clouds. Belshazzar would not have entered the scale could he have helped it. Some of us would not enter it could we help it. But

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what can we do? The almighty will is that every soul shall be set over against the Divine Law for purpose of comparison; and our most desperate struggles cannot even embarrass that comparison. Into the scale we go, willing or unwilling; not even a single little thought can we keep back from the sweeping verdict of that scaled beam which, firmly held in the Almighty hand, ceases not to travel up and down, in silent but terrible glitter, the cloudy hights of our sky. Can you hide from those devouring scales? Can you pluck them down from their high places and abolish them? Can you pray yourself out of them? What *can* you do? Nothing. You cannot help yourself, and nobody can help you. You must take the lot of all who have gone before you, the lot of all who shall come after you — and be weighed. And as that great beam sways up and down the sky in verdict on all that you are and do, you may comfort yourself with the thought, if comfort it be, that your case is not exceptional — that the same beam sways in its silent but terrible glitter for *all*, choose they, refuse they.

The weight of each character is given with wonderful accuracy. Never so delicate a balance as this. It will weigh the smallest thought, the

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subtlest motive. Quantities that men in estimating each other always neglect as of no account — indeed quantities too small for human sight or even for human science — are always noted without difficulty and to the very last figure by that most sensitive of all known balances. How that druggist prides himself on the delicate scales with which he estimates the most homeopathic doses! He wants nothing more sensitive. How that philosopher prides himself on his Ramsden or Torsion, encased in glass and feeling the thousandth of a grain! It is wonderful. Call it a miracle of the mechanic arts. But it is so much less wonderful than the Balance that weighed Belshazzar, and that weighs you and me, that I for one make no account of it. The thousandth part of a grain! Why, yon Balance in the sky that I trust you plainly see, will stagger under the thousand millionth part of a grain. It will feel the weight of a shadow, will move with a next to nothing. No one may flatter himself that the smallest atom of his sinfulness will escape detection. Can he lengthen his arm of the lever? Can he lighten the weights? Can he confuse or bribe or frighten the Weigher — as He sits on His cloudy throne, holding in omnipotent hand and watching with omniscient eye the rising and sinking fates?

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Why this universal, inexorable, and most accurate weighing of human character? Does God weigh souls as men sometimes do bodies — from mere curiosity? Has He filled the great scale with our conduct and hearts because He is speculatively curious to know whether they will figure up to so much, or only to so much? The fact is, God has determined to hold men responsible for their weight. He must do so. His kingdom cannot stand unless He treat men according to character. So He has appointed a day for bringing every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. Here is the secret of that wonderful Balance. God means to judge and punish and reward justly; so He hangs out His glittering scales and takes close account of our moral and religious condition, moment by moment. How far does it go toward equilibrium with a perfect law? Such is the question He is bent on answering to the last tittle. But oh, not in the spirit in which the philosopher weighs the hydrogen or the planet — the spirit of scientific curiosity, the spirit that had as lief find one thing as another provided it only find the truth. God has a strong preference as to what He shall find when He poises on high our

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conduct and character. He wants to see them as heavy as possible. Though they weigh like worlds, all the better. They shall strain neither His wonderful scales nor His wonderful arm. He abhors light weight. A character that is mere feather and thistle-down He hates to find. He does sometimes find men "lighter than vanity;" the scale in which they are cast springs suddenly aloft with terrible force; they are chaff of zeroes which a breath sets afloat; but this is the sort of finding that seems to Him inexpressibly melancholy and displeases Him beyond everything. For His weighing looks hard toward a judgment day. He must at last treat men according to their weight. If they weigh lightly they will suffer for it — if heavily they will be rewarded for it. For this is *character*, and not matter, that God is poising aloft. Man shall not be held responsible for the gravity of his flesh and blood; and whether the testing scales credit him with tens or with hundreds of pounds he shall return to his business alike unblamed and unblamable. Not so when character goes into the Balance. Now the man shall be held responsible for the figures. Let him weigh lightly at his peril. One must come up to a given standard under an awful penalty.

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It is not necessary for him to be personally in perfect equilibrium with the Divine law; but a certain weight he must have. He must have that which belongs to a penitent and believing character. This indeed is far from being a full offset to a perfect law, but then the Great Weigher can and will cast into the same scale a *Something* that is sure to make equilibrium. Penitence itself is heavy. There is inexpressible gravity in it. It makes a character otherwise light press like lead in the scales of God. And when a certain great Sacrifice is added to it, it is every whit as heavy as all the ten commandments. Up to this standard weight every human being must see to it that he comes. No excuse will be taken. No compromise will be made. There is no telling the amount of evil that will come upon you unless you press that mysterious Balance which glitters among the clouds with the full weight of a penitent and believing sinner. Now God's hand bears hard on your scale. He is giving you time to throw godly sorrow and faith into it. If you fail to do it, He will some day remove His hand, and then your scale will leap suddenly aloft with angry glitter and terrible shock, and cast you out — WHITHER?

What various verdicts that Heavenly Balance

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actually pronounces on men! None weigh as much as they ought. But some are far heavier than others. Some weigh like prophets and apostles; others like Belshazzars and Judases. Some weigh enough to be saved — thanks to a heavy Atonement mercifully cast into their scale — others weigh so little as to be lost. Nothing, less than nothing and vanity. Up goes the glittering, terrible beam on their side — down goes the glittering, terrible beam on the side of the Holy Law. The great shock shoots them forth in dreadful parabola. WHITHER?

To which of these classes do you belong? Is your character heavy enough to pass the ordeal of yonder Balance? Have you taken care to have your character bear down strongly by means of that supplementary weight which God gives to penitent and believing sinners? This is the supreme question. Naturally we are all *wanting* — by nature children of wrath — has the natural deficiency been supplied by grace and a gracious repentance? Perhaps the vapors that rise from your business or busy diversions are hiding from view the great Sky-Balance; and though you see no penitence and faith in your heart you are not disturbed because neither do you see that stern

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weighing of yourself that is going on in your beclouded heaven. If so make an effort to put away the concealing clouds. It much concerns you to see, and to keep in sight, that mighty Balance from which none can escape. Forget all other scales, if need be, in order to remember this. And remember that it has pronounced you, if you are still in your natural state, a disloyal subject of God — especially as to the first and great commandment.

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XI.

DIVINE ECONOMY OF REPRISALS.

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XI.

DIVINE ECONOMY OF REPRISALS.

WE are strongly inclined to treat others as they treat us. If they injure us we are roused to return the injury: if they do us a favor we feel pressed to do an equal favor in return. Kind feelings and kind words, almost as a matter of course, get from us an answer in kind; while ill-will and bitter speech summon us up to an answering bitterness. Retaliation is the habit of human nature in its fallen state.

Moreover, society, as such, sustains itself on the same principle. In the case of men considered merely as individuals, the practice of doing to others as they do to us is a bad one; in the case of men considered as a society, it is even a necessary means of self-preservation. The family is kept together in comfort and thrift only when the parent wisely requites the evil of his children with evil and their good with good. The state is kept in order only when the ruler requites the evil and the good of his subjects with answering evil and

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good. Whether the ruler be father, school-master, or king, he must take account of how those under him behave, and must make himself by mingled penalties and rewards a terror to evil-doers and a praise to such as do well. Else society will fall to pieces. And the pieces will fight each other into the worst sort of chaos.

The fallen state of human nature requires that human governments of all sorts plant themselves on a system of retaliation. A similar system lies at the foundation of the Divine Government over men. "He will not turn away His face from you, if ye return unto Him." Suppose Israel will not return. Then, of course, God's face will be turned away. Here is *retaliation* — a holy retaliation doubtless, but still a real one. God will treat the people somewhat as they treat Him. If they betake themselves to loving and serving Him, He will smile on them — if they refuse or neglect, He will frown on them. "Return unto me and I will return unto you; forsake me and I will forsake you" — this is the avowed principle on which God treated Israel through the whole course of their history. Of course He does not treat the world at large on any milder system. Men are to reap as they sow. The

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recompense of a man's hand shall be rendered to him. "According to our deeds accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay recompense." One prophet styles God a "God of recompenses;" and the more we study His providence the better satisfied we shall be that He well deserves the title. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," is the principle on which God governs us. Raise your hand against Him, and He will raise hand against you. Neglect Him, and when your time of need comes He will neglect you. Love Him as father, and He will love you as children. Consult His pleasure and interest in what you do, and He will consult your profit and happiness in all that He does. To all your conduct, as far as it bears on Him, there will be an echo from heaven. This echo may not come promptly; after the manner of echoes, its coming may be delayed by various circumstances; but at last your ear will be reached. The rash traveler who casts up a stone against the mighty cliff which overhangs him will bring down another stone on himself; and the arrow shot toward Heaven will dislodge and bring down another arrow, sharp and bright from the Divine arsenal.

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If any should say that such a principle of retaliation in the Divine Government cannot be made out by observation, I am free to allow that it cannot. There is no *visible* respect always paid to character in the distribution of good and evil by Providence in this world. It does not however follow that no such respect exists because none is noticed just at present. But a small part of any man's career has yet come under observation. The recompensing blessing or trial which has not yet arrived may be on its way — may have been on its way ever since the act to which it answers took place — like the ray of light which at that moment left some far star and is yet shooting toward us, destined to reach us perhaps a year hence. Also, it may be fairly presumed that many of God's recompenses take effect only inwardly and invisibly. No amount of looking can discover them, for their place is deep within the closed heart. The unwindowed walls of flesh and blood hide from prying eyes what is passing within — perhaps a crucifixion, perhaps a coronation. Again, many trials and blessings may reasonably be supposed to be mere correctives, means of moral improvement; having nothing of the character of proportionate requitals for the

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good and evil of those experiencing them. So that one can never infer that because the tower of Siloam fell on eighteen men and slew them they were sinners above other Galileans, or that because Austria prevailed over Hungary the stronger had the better cause.

"But is it not wrong for man to render evil for evil? Nay, is it not even his duty to repay evil with good — to love them that hate him, and to pray for those who despitefully use and persecute him? Is it wicked for me to retaliate, and righteous for God to do it?" Yes, wicked for you as an individual — righteous for God as a magistrate. The human parent or king, as such, is bound to have his system of requital in kind; neither family nor state can prosper without it. And if it is in either of these characters that God retaliates, while simply as a being He would crave and seek the happiness of all, no fault can be found. It is all righteous and even indispensable.

Having fixed in our minds that we have a God of recompenses, let us proceed to look more narrowly into the nature of His system of reprisals. The matter of the reprisal is plain: it is evil for evil, good for good. As to the degree of it, it is equally plain that He must render to men in pro-

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portion as they render to Him. The worse a man treats God the worse will God treat him : and the better a man treats God the better will God treat him. He does not give the smaller sin the severer smiting : He never gives the greater virtue the less approval. "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" — see the plain principle of equitable proportion! As the father punishes gross disobedience in his children heavily and slight disobedience slightly ; as the law of the land visits for murder with death and for theft with short imprisonment ; so the Divine Father and Lawgiver proportions what He renders to what He receives. The great offender shall be beaten with many stripes ; the comparatively small offender with few stripes. The louder our feelings and acts speak against God, the louder the echo which is flung back on us from the sky. A single missile feebly thrown up against the mountain side will bring down on you but a single stone ; while a shower of missiles fiercely sent will fill all the air with stony retaliations. The more turf and stones yon traveler casts into the volcano or the geyser of God's government the louder and fiercer will be the eruption. O all ye Chorazins and Bethsaidas, much more tolerable shall it be for

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Sodom and Gomorrah than for you ; for you have given God a more direct insult and decided rejection than they ; and His purpose is to treat men according to their works.

The retaliations of God are noticeably distinguished from those of men by their *perfect sureness*. Men sometimes forget the ill-will or good-will of which they are the objects, the benefits or injuries they have received ; and so do not deal forth the recompensing good or evil. But God never forgets the aversion or the love, the obedience or the disobedience. Some men are unstable of purpose or wanting in power ; and so fail to carry out the retaliations they have intended. Very often parents' hearts fail them when it comes to the point of laying on their children the stripes they have deserved. Occasionally, the civil power finds itself not strong enough to deal with some powerful offender, and so allows him to have his disobedience without his punishment. But God's retaliations will be hampered with no weak tenderness. No creature-strength is great enough to fight off, or frighten off, His retributions. Nor has an offender anything to hope from an infirmity of the Divine purpose. To know that God is bent on reprisals is to know that the reprisals will take place

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without fail. The most iron firmness of resolution ever shown by man is merest fickleness over against the mighty immovableness we see in God. No reed shaken with the wind is He; but a pillar, rooted, erect, of mighty circumference, and fit to bear grandly up the earth and heavens forever. He has purposed, He has promised, that we shall have from Him according to the state of our hearts and the work of our hands. "Hath He said and shall He not do it — hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?" Sooner or later, in this place or in that, we are certain to be overtaken with the rebukes or the blessings suited to the hearts we persist in having and the lives we persist in living.

An important feature of the retaliation put forth by God among us is its *universality*. It takes effect on all men without exception. None is too powerful to be smitten for his sins. None is so insignificant as to be overlooked by the All-Seeing. However little good a man does, God will see it and bless him for that: and however little evil he does, God will see and rebuke him for that. Even the little child is not left out from the Divine economy of retaliations. Nor the benighted heathen. "Tribulation to every soul of

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man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace to every man that doeth good, to the Jew first and also of the Gentile." How different the field on which a man works out his few and uncertain requitals! Many may love or hate, help or injure him, and yet he never know it. It is impossible for him to trace many events which have a decided bearing on his interests to the persons from whom they sprang. And then, again, where his knowledge does not fail him his power often does. His arm is not long enough to reach many known friends and enemies who act upon him from a distance. It is not strong enough to repay many of his assailants — not resourceful enough to help many who yet have been able to help him. So that it is only a few persons, compared with the whole number of men, whom a single person can make the objects of an intelligent and discriminating retaliation. But God, the God of recompenses, recompenses on a very different scale. His economy of reprisals sweeps the whole planet. It stretches out a thousand hands and grasps all the generations. He knows how each one of our thousand millions of humanity, all of whom know Him or should know Him, feels and does towards Him.

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He can reach them all. He is strong enough to do His pleasure on the strongest, wise enough to defeat the evasions of the craftiest, particular enough to take account of the least thing done by the least of men. Nobody on the face of the earth is small enough or great enough to be outside of that field where God is busy in rendering to every man according to his work.

As no retaliations made by man can compare with the Divine in respect to the extent of the field covered, so none can compare with them in respect to *weight and intensity*. God being so great and glorious, all offenses against Him are vastly worse than they would be if committed against any man. Bad treatment of a tender, self-sacrificing parent is always thought a wonderfully greater crime than like treatment of some stranger. Abuse of one high in character and station and dignity is always counted more scandalous than the same offense against meaner men. Was it the same thing for Shimei to shake his clinched hand at illustrious, anointed David as it was to shake it at the humblest soldier on the outskirt of the host? Was it no worse for petted Absalom to draw sword on his father than it would have been for some vexed Philistine to do it? Would it

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have become magnificent Solomon to bestow such reward for services rendered him as would have suitably come from a common citizen? We may therefore depend on the Divine retaliations, whether for good or evil, being very different things in degree from those which pass between man and man. The requitals of God will have something of His greatness about them. They will be mighty like His own riches and power and good-deservings at our hands. Who knows but that some of His rebukes and rewards will endure like eternity? Who knows but that some of them will shine and rejoice like heaven, or darken and wail like hell?

Such is the principle of retaliation belonging to the Divine Government over men. Really, surely, universally, and mightily, God treats men according as they treat Him. Let all who are at heart enemies of this God of recompenses, look to it! Look to it ye who do the great sin of living without God in the world! It is no weak tenderness that sits on the throne over us. *Reprisals! Reprisals! Reprisals!* I ring it in your ears that you may not forget what is seemingly forgotten by so many. Do not misunderstand the system under which you are living. Do not let the whole

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opaque world get between you and God, and so cut off from view His Balance and His sword. I see them — see you them also. I fear them — fear you them as well. Not that God is vindictive. Far be it from me to carry such an idea. But He is *Government* — an indispensable Government — and must maintain Himself at all costs. And He will. Never dream the contrary. Ah, I have seen *such* dreamers! Their eyes were shut on actual Nature and Providence; shut on the Bible with its quite as solid realities; and their fancies went and came and built up out of many colored vapors a God who is not strict to mark iniquity, and an eternity overrun with indulgence and barren of justice! What a waking it will be! Have no part in it. See no such "false visions and causes of banishment." But with eyes wide open see God the Just who will render to every man according to his work, and who would sooner see heaven and earth pass away than one jot or tittle of His law fail.

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XII.

THE GLOOMY PATH.

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XII.

THE GLOOMY PATH.

THE path of sin shows marks of great and constant use. It is thoroughly beaten. Plainly nations have been upon it — and generations. Here are tracks as old as time and fresh as the last moment ; tracks of the young, and tracks of the old ; tracks of bare feet, and tracks of costly sandals ; the far-apart tracks of eager and practiced travelers, and the close-together tracks of timid beginners ; the vague and shuffled tracks of the weak, and the hesitating, and the sharp, deep tracks of the strong and decisive. Who has not helped to make these innumerable footprints ? The measure of every man's foot, from Adam down to you and me, might be taken in this broad and beaten path. The constant pressure and friction of so many feet have worn it bare of every green thing, and, just beneath the powdered and printed surface, all is trampled and compacted into stone.

A path so swarmed upon can hardly be with-

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out some points of attractiveness. The public are not compelled to use it. They are not shut in upon it, and then driven along like so many helpless brutes. Not against desire and choice, but because of them, is this broad road so trampled and powdered by thronging people. What is there so attractive about it? To me it seems gloomy. Why is it so crowded and blackened with pilgrims? I take it on me to say, *for no good reason.* It ought to be all overgrown to grass. It ought to be an evergreen. Not a single human footprint should be found on any part of it.

There are no footprints of God upon it.

The command, "Be ye followers of God," would never bring a man on this path. Beaten as it is, crowded as it is with tracks of almost all sorts, we look in vain through its entire length for anything like Divine footprints. They are not to be found at its beginning, its middle, or its end. They neither cross it, nor accompany it, nor approach it. Nowhere in its neighborhood does a single such mighty track as Divinity would make print the ground. Had the foot of God ever been set here we could see the deep track to-day. Nothing could have obliterated it. The quaking way

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would never have forgotten it. It would be jarring still though trodden an eternity ago. No, the print Divine is not here — not the smallest trace of it which one may fall down and kiss in all this beaten way.

Is it no discredit to a path that it has not on it a trace of the God whose steps are so plain and many over all the fields of earth and sky — that it is a path which this most illustrious One can be tempted by no considerations to touch foot upon? Man needs to walk by the side of the Creator, to be supported by His strength, comforted by His comforts, defended by His shield. A gloomy road it is that parts us from His company.

On this beaten Path are found the footprints of Satan, and such as Satan.

Distinct and fresh as if made but a moment ago, traversing the path in every direction, overlying and underlying the feebler human tracks, are seen the broad, deep, and very peculiar prints of the great adversary. It is plain that he has made a home of the way from the very first. His tracks are below all others and above all others. You can measure the great strides by which he has come and gone and come again for thousands of years. And no wonder that every-

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where on this great turnpike appears the ugly scar of his ponderous and misshapen foot: for it is his road, he was the engineer who contrived and built it, and he it is who keeps it in repair. This, albeit some say that *God* built it!

Other demon tracks are here also. Millions of them. As many quite as are the human tracks. The tracks of Moloch and Belial and Mammon and Beelzebub and a host of lesser Satans, crowd after those of their prince. Here, too, are the scars left by murderers and robbers and traitors; by Cains, dwellers in Sodom, Ahabs, Judases; by the worst of mankind — men hardly better than the fiends whose tracks mingle with their own.

Does one want to keep company with such travelers? Ought it not to be set down as against any path that it is the choice of such dreadful feet — and of such a crowd of them? Is it not reasonable for a man to say, as I do say with all my heart, that he is not willing to leave behind him footprints in friendly neighborhood, and pointing the same way, with those of fiends on the earth and fiends below it? A road managed and occupied in force by such black and terrible characters deserves to be called *gloomy*.

This beaten way is impressively warned against and forbidden.

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Have you never seen a path at the head of which stood a notice-board with some such inscription as this, "This road unsafe," "The small-pox on this road," "No trespassing on these premises under penalty of the law?" Well, I have seen such warnings posted at the head and along the sides of the path of sin — put up, as I happen to know, by authority — no mere make-believes, but established in good faith by Him who is truth itself. And all can see them who choose. There they are — read for yourselves. "Refrain thy foot" — "No peace to the wicked" — "Leadeth to destruction" — "Turn ye, for why will ye die." All along the gloomy way, at every mile-stone, such inscriptions stare one in the face. The letters are large, are heavily drawn, are as legible as ever printed language was, can be read whole leagues away with good eyes. Are these man's work? Believe it not. These are the *Bewares* of that great Friend whose smallest word is mighty with meaning. I would not like to travel a road that is headed and flanked with such cautions. I will not. Are not such posters a sufficient reason why any one should refuse to walk in such a path? Are they not enough in themselves to make the path a gloomy one? What if we can-

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not see with our own eyes anything so very perilous or guilty or undesirable about it — is not God's testimony quite as good as our sight? But we can see some very unpleasant things for ourselves — and among them that,

This broad and beaten Path slopes downward before the traveler, instead of upward.

It is plain to see — this is no ascending path. One does not go forward on it to broader views, and purer airs, and clearer vision; as if gradually rising into the Delectable Mountains, whose summits, above all cloud and damp, descry the gates of the Celestial City. Every step forward brings the traveler to a lower level; to a narrower, mistier, sicklier region. The descent, in general, is not abrupt. In fact, it is exceedingly gradual, so as to be almost imperceptible for short distances. Only when long spaces are swept by the eye does the downward bearing of the road show itself. Sweep far, however, and the slope becomes very sensible; and we satisfy ourselves that one has but to continue traveling to reach at last an awful depth — depth of sin, error, and misery. The gloomy road is always creeping further and further into the bowels of the earth — always forsaking the cheerful light more and more. This is

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what the Bible means when it says that evil men wax worse and worse. This is what the ancients and experience mean when they say, *Resist the beginnings.*

Some think it easier to go downward than upward. I do not care to dispute them. Still, downward is an unfortunate direction. One does not like to feel that he is ever getting worse off as to all his principal interests. Still worse is it to *be* ever getting worse off. Every day a little further from truth and goodness and God and happiness — every day marring one's situation somewhat instead of mending it! Not a pleasant thought to have — and a worse fact.

This beaten Path is painfully, though in some respects easily, traveled.

Mere ease of putting one foot before another is only one out of many particulars on which the comfort of a path depends. Is it well lighted, healthy, well-watered and provisioned, inexpensive, safe? Or is it the opposite of all these? There is a road through the Roman Campagna, called the Aurelian. It is well-built, broad, smooth. I rode over it with few jolts, and with great rapidity. But I traveled by night. In the pale starlight, by the "struggling moonbeams' misty

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light," I saw right and left, as I dashed along, great stretches of barrens: no fair homes, no flocks and herds, no streams and fountains, no granaries and markets and hospitable shelters. Through the windows of the diligence, at every stage, poured in extortionate demands from the already overpaid harpies who managed and infested the road. And, all the while, the hot, heavy, stifling air of the Pontine Marshes was sifting into my oppressed lungs and aching veins. No unjolting swiftness of the travel paid me for such inconveniences. That I moved so easily, that I could miserably drowse as I went, did not go far toward reconciling me to the dark, dismal, expensive, mephitic, and unsafe road.

And such is that broad and beaten path on which sinners are swiftly going. The traveler shall not be hindered. He shall have the least possible shaking on this ancient, smooth, and well-built highway. His advance shall be so quietly made that he can drowse away most of his journey — miserably drowse, with a half consciousness of a grim darkness, and a parched wilderness, and ruinous exactions, and pitiless brigands, and deadly gases crowding in on him from all sides. The way of sin is always cloud-beset and night-

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beset. No traveler ever knew heavenly sunlight stream on it for a moment. The only light it gets from above is from the lightnings. Ignes Fatui, blue-flamed volcanoes, here and there a faint earthly lantern, cast on it their vague and sickly rays. The concave that arches it is ever black with Divine disfavor, rebuke, threat, judgments. Not a breath of pure air blows across the gloom. It is all charged with noxious gases — with tainted breath of Satan and his demons. Its travelers are sick. There is not a sound person among them ; not one who does not sorely need a physician. And how should there be, with such a diseased and typhus-reeking atmosphere? All the dens of city and country, all the garbage and refuse and sewarage of the entire world, are on this thoroughfare — why should it not be malarious? The constant business of all who travel it is to produce what God considers and expressly calls "corruption," "uncleanness," "pollution," "vileness," "abominableness" — how should it not be distempered and infectious? In speaking of the path of sin as being waterless, and foodless, and shelterless, I speak of things as God sees them and as they really are ; not as they may seem to a diseased and delirious fancy. For aught

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I know, that desert Campagna has seemed fair and fertile to some. The dreadful Sahara itself has seemed to many a disordered eye to be stocked with waters and meadows and gardens and cities. But what of that? Do I not know that it is all an illusion? And if any suppose that the way of transgressors is easy, and stocked or skirted with real satisfactions (as no doubt many do), do I not know that never was grosser mistake; that what seem delicious running waters are not so; that what seems wheat is mere chaff; that what seem bowers and gardens is positively nothing but cloud — and storm-cloud at that? He who knows says, *The way of transgressors is hard.* I believe Him. Its satisfactions are hollow, its pleasures are bitter, its fruit (just as soon as you break the painted and glossy rind) mere dust and ashes on the disappointed tongue. If the first taste is sweet, afterward the mouth is filled with gravel.

Besides, never was known so costly a road; that is, one so expensive to travel upon. It wears out and dilapidates human nature beyond all account. You pay such tolls and fares for the privilege of going on it as no purse can stand, as never road demanded before — a wealth of moral

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capacities, opportunities, usefulness, enjoyment, heavenly favor. The gold flows from one in a steady stream. It evaporates from him at every pore ; and no power on earth can stop the exhaustive process so long as the traveling continues. The world robs him and Satan robs him. All the winds of Heaven rob him. He robs himself. He is losing something valuable out of his moral nature every moment. However wide and deep his treasury, he cannot pass a life-time on this road without finding himself in straits and rags at last. A rich man never died upon it. All its travelers die paupers. And this, though not a few of them, on their very last day, congratulate themselves and are congratulated by others after the old way, " Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry " — flattering themselves that they are 'rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing, while actually wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.' Who travels on Satan's territory is specially at Satan's mercy ; and the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. He is also specially at God's mercy, at His *uncovenanted* mercy — say, trembling at the gates of His justice and judgments. What may not hap-

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pen to such a man? What pits may not suddenly gape at his feet? What stormy disasters may not suddenly roar and flash about him? Who would like to guarantee him against falling at any moment into the hands of the living God — that fearful thing? Can any imagine that the wicked and the righteous are standing on precisely the same footing of safety with a just and Almighty Heaven? Let him whose course of travel lies along the broad and beaten way of sin assure himself that he is hemmed in by perils and judgments as no other wayfarer is. He cannot but be dimly conscious of the fact, and so restless and apprehensive.

Its course is downward, its progress painful, and

Its end is terrible. After descending for a while, this evil thoroughfare suddenly comes to an end. It breaks off squarely at the edge of a precipice. Who ever measured the perpendicular face of that precipice — rushing down and down, seemingly without end! Ah, my friend, this broad road, this beaten road, this road which it is so hard to turn men from, empties into a *bottomless pit.* Suddenly it pours down the cliff all its travelers. Headlong they plunge, as men from

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dizzy steeples; and the dark receives and hides them, as we shudderingly watch them shooting through the air; but the air remains filled with moans and wails pitched in every possible key of fright and misery. Will those unhappy travelers ever be seen again? Will they climb up that face of steepest and most slippery rock? Never. You see them for the last time — unless, indeed, you go shooting and plunging after them from the same dreadful brink. "Leadeth to destruction" — behold the crowning feature of this thronged but yet most evil road; one that begins badly, progresses worse, and ends worst of all! However fair and comfortable and luxurious a road may be in the main, give it such an ending as this, and you ought to terrify from it every traveler. All is well that ends well. All is disastrous that ends disastrously. Who needs to know more about the path of sin than the bare fact that it empties into death and hell? If possible, leave it — leave it instantly. If it weighs little with you that no footprint of God is on this road; that it is tracked all over by the feet of Satan and such as Satan; that it bristles with Bewares that have great look of genuineness and authority; that it slopes ever downward in

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advance of the traveler; that it has no real and solid satisfactions anywhere along it, but is painfully dark and barren and mephitic and dangerous; — if none of these things move you, at least allow yourself to be moved by considering what the *end* of your road will surely be. If this is not a moving consideration where will you find one?

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XIII.

ITS TERRIBLE END.

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ITS TERRIBLE END.

BEHOLD certain persons walking in the midst of a rugged wilderness! Their path creeps along the bare rock, and up steep mountain-sides, and by the brinks of profound chasms, and down slopes so smooth and steep and far-stretching that one shudders as he looks. To highten the danger, the way is dark and slippery. Dense and deceitful mists hang about all objects. The foot slides easily from its hold on the moist rock. The shrub which the hand instinctively grasps at for safety tears out readily from its shallow and softened bed. On all sides gloom and instability haunt the steps.

Such is the region in which are walking all enemies of God. Nay, such is the region in which not a few of them are *running* with careless steps. "The way of the wicked is as darkness." "Thou hast set them in slippery places." As might be expected, the most dismal scenes are constantly happening. We see the feet slide. We see one

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and another suddenly "stumble on the dark mountains," and disappear in black abysses which promise never to yield them up again. We see one and another plunging swiftly down terrible precipices as if to be dashed in pieces at the bottom. And we know that the same thing is happening almost every moment in that part of the dark mountains which is beyond our personal view. More than this we know. We know that not a single individual of all the multitudes who are now pressing along these dangerous grounds will, if he continues on them, escape a miserable end. In due time all their feet will slide. Some will slip soon. Others will hold on their way for years. A few, after many hair-breadth escapes, will succeed in keeping their foothold for three-score years and ten. But at last all will slip beyond recovery, and shoot down into the black gulfs that yawn on every hand.

It is a *sure* matter. This sliding is not a thing that may be, it is the thing that shall be. Never was verdict of the mathematics, never decision of fate, more iron and unyielding than that word of Scripture which settles what the end of the wicked shall be. Let no man delude himself for a moment with the idea that through some happy

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chance, some shrewd tactics, some Divine partiality, some blessed *something*, the slippery way on which so many have slipped will not finally see him slip also. It will — it will. Nothing under the great canopy can keep him always erect whom God is bent on prostrating. He is pledged to take the sinner's feet from under him. He is committed to see that the sliding once begun shall not stop or linger till it becomes a fall, and the fallen soul has gone sheer down the dreadful depths. "Thou hast set them in slippery places; thou castest them down into destruction." Has He said and will He not do it? Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil. They flatter themselves that in some way the impunity which has been so long enjoyed will never fail them. But a little longer continuance in their present courses will undeceive them. Experience of sliding will convince them of the certainty of it. They will find that all the warnings they have had, and to which haply they have closed their ears, were true though scant prophecy; that it has never been God's plan merely to alarm with thunder, but also to smite with the lightning; that "dark mountains" on

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which feet may stumble, "slippery paths" on which they may slide, and a "casting down into destruction," are not mere fancies of distempered brains, but facts which it has been their madness to neglect; that every appearance of uncertainty which at any time belonged to the disaster they have reached was due to their own dim-seeing hearts; and that, all along, the fated day of sliding has been moving toward them with the steadiness and momentum of a revolving world.

Have some kept on their feet *long* amid these dark and slippery places? Let them not be encouraged to hope that they will always be so successful. The day is coming that will see their good fortune forsake them — will see their feet pass from under them despite all the care and skill they can summon.

Are some moving along *confidently and proudly* — as though they were treading level highways, balustered on either hand, and on which the sun never ceases to shine? Their proud confidence is baseless. Fate is on her way. No assurance can look her out of countenance, and make her step hesitate for a single moment. In due time she will reach every bold sinner, and then his step will slide.

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Are some staying themselves on *the staff of this world* — the abundant mammon, the many friends, the great places they hold in society? Whatever uses belong to these things, that of steadying the feet of the wicked along the slippery places of his wickedness is not one of them. The broken reed will pierce the hand that uses it, and will not delay the sliding of the foot in due time.

Do some of these travelers reckon vastly on the *Divine mercy?* That has held them up long. It may hold them up a while longer. It may enable them to pass some more dreadful brinks and slopes safely. But the catastrophe will come at last. Suddenly — O merciful God! But mercy has resigned its place to justice, and prayers avail not. And so the wicked feet must slide.

There will be no exception. The same fate will overtake all who continue in this black and perilous realm. None so strong, none so intelligent, none so practiced, none so watchful, as to keep footing permanently on the path that sinners travel. High-spoken opposers of religion, the profane swearer, the outrageous sabbath-breaker, the scoffer at things sacred, the man who deliberately sets himself to break down moral principle in the community, to poison in the young the fountains

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of virtue and faith, and to draw back to ways of sin and shame those who are making the first feeble efforts to forsake them — depend on it they will not always go on as they do now. It will not be without effect that they set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue walketh through the earth; that they devise mischief on their beds and hunt every man his brother with a net. In due time the slipperiness of their path will prove too hard for them. Their feet will slide — slide down the awful depths.

And all unbelievers will share the fate of all disbelievers. The doubters of the Bible hold on the skirts of those who scoff at it — the faithless join hands with those who count religion an imposture. They will go on for a while, and then their feet will slide swift as the lightning — slide down the awful depths.

God has other disloyal subjects than those who receive not His Scripture. Of the many who profess to believe it, most are indifferent to its teachings. They can read without concern that they are sinners, that God is angry, and that He will at last rain on the wicked snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest. But the day of doom has set out to reach these cold hearts. In time its

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strong wind will blow on them till they shake and grasp at straws for stability. Nothing shall save them. As with the bold opposers of religion, as with all faithless ones, their feet will slide — slide down the awful depths.

All those who see and feel the claims of religion, but remain halting between two opinions — who cannot quite resolve to do at any present moment what they feel must be done at some time — will at last reach a point on which foot will not hold, let them try to plant it never so firmly. Over them also the slipperiness of their way will triumph. They may grasp on the right hand and on the left, and strain every muscle to fix into firmness their wavering step. In vain. As with the impious and profane, as with the scoffer and the faithless, as with the careless and the insensible, there will be no help for them. Swifter than the arrow just launched from some mighty bow, their feet will slide — slide down the awful depths.

Behold again what sort of a region this is on which sinners are traveling! So you will understand better what it is to lose footing on it. It is to fall, it is to fall totally, it is to fall down infinite precipices, it is to fall so as to be "broken

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without remedy." The way is too steep and slippery, the awful chasms are too many and near, the sides of the path are too bare of what the hand might grasp in the instinct of self-preservation, to allow him who has once slidden to escape from this whole series of horrors. Despite his best efforts, the slipping sinner cannot recover himself. He shall fall and glance along steeps whose smooth and icy sides stretch down deep into hell. How can he escape? How can that abrupt fall do less than shoot him from precipice to precipice, and from abyss to abyss, till at last he plunges to the rocky bottom of the "everlasting destruction?" There, broken into a shapeless and gory mass, will lie the man who once stood sublimely erect, and with face uplift to Heaven saw God and the angels beckoning him thither. And the wreck of his humanity shall never get reconstruction. The ruin is too awful for that. To all eternity it shall remain the ungathered and terrifying example of the wages of sin. The man "has perished." The soul is "lost." The chaff is burnt with "unquenchable fire." O wandering star to whom is "reserved the blackness of darkness forever!" Can you well think what it is to have your whole being and

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interest crushed beyond the power of any healing art which creature ever knew or the Creator ever used? Do you find yourself able to realize what it is to have character and happiness shattered beyond redemption? Then you can know what it is to have your "feet slide in due time."

But that "due time!" Perhaps these qualifying words are giving to some the means of avoiding present alarm in view of the sliding. "Yes, it is certain that wicked feet will slide — but not now. There is no immediate danger. The due time will come to me, if ever, at some far distant day — at the end of years upon years." This is *your* thought. The thought of God is that it will come when your destruction will be most serviceable to His kingdom; the thought of him who will allow himself to be taught by observation is that it is likely to come soon and may come today. If you are treated like most others, it will come at a time when you look not for it, at a time when you are looking for peace instead of sudden destruction. Not when you want to slide will the mortal sliding come; not when you are willing to slide; but when you wish above all things to stand as firmly as the hills, when sliding is hateful and alarming to you beyond anything you have

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ever known, when your wretched soul will quake like the aspen as it catches at the terrible slopes down which it is plunging. For the sake of certain beggarly elements of this world it is that you are content, and more than content, to wander about on these dark and slippery mountains. You dash down unknown depths into perdition in fulfillment of a barter in which you exchange your soul for the promise of a little good in this world. The compensation you get is nothing but this *promise* — which will prove itself hollow. The due time of your sliding will come before you have received even that miserable pittance for the bare promise of which you have bartered away yourselves. Sin will not even pay for your ruin the farthing compensation it engaged to pay. Your feet will slide, and your whole being go rushing into the abysses of the death of deaths, at a time when you will feel that sin has cheated you out of two worlds. And as you are projected by that disastrous sliding from mountain to mountain, from gulf to gulf, and from blackness to blackness, the echoes of that unspeakable fall will shape themselves into articulate voices and cry in your appalled ear, "The wages of sin is death." Oh, remember that the due time of the sinner's sliding

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is such time as pleases God, and not such time as pleases you. It may not be a hand-breadth away. Even now it may be smiting on your unwary feet with the first feeble instalments of those strokes which, ere another season has come round, will have brought you down the worst precipices of destruction. As a thief it will come. You will not know at what hour. You will be taken by surprise, and hurried from your footing as by a whirlwind. Such is the due time in which the feet of all persevering sinners shall slide.

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XIV.

VAIN CITIES OF REFUGE.

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XIV.

VAIN CITIES OF REFUGE.

FROM the reproaches and forebodings of conscience, from the dreadful threats of Holy Scripture, from the Wrath of God following hard after them, sinners must take refuge.

Where shall they go? To what stronghold, to what City of Refuge?

In the open country, without arms offensive and defensive, the tramp and glitter and rush of advancing judgments filling all the air — it is impossible to stand still and quietly await the progress of events. The Wrath to Come, the falling into the hands of the Living God, the Everlasting Destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power — such things cannot be endured, cannot be calmly waited for with open-eyed expectation. "Flee," says the fluttering heart. "Flee," say the native instincts and judgments! "But whither? Where shall I find a safe place? To what point shall I hasten where I can throw off my fears and bless myself with a sense of perfect security?"

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In this state of alarm and inquiry some sinners flee to the City of Unbelief. It is not far from them. Its population is large. It numbers among its citizens some men of note and ability; and they freely profess to feel in no manner of danger from the Destroyer. So these sinners in their alarm run thither. They allow themselves to be persuaded that conscience and the Scriptures, with their forebodings and threats, are not reliable. There is no Wrath to Come. There is no avenger of blood hastening upon them. Men have misinterpreted the Scriptures; or the Scriptures themselves are a merely human invention. At least there is no sufficient proof that they are Divine. I say, some sinners allow themselves to take refuge from alarm in such notions as these. They become unbelievers, and try to feel safe from the Destroyer.

What sort of a city of refuge is this Unbelief? See my account of it. It is one of the coldest, chilliest, dreariest, cities on God's earth. Its officers, and leading citizens from the beginning — and indeed the great bulk of its people — have been the foes of order and virtue among men, both by teaching and example. And, besides, the place is falling into ruin. Its walls are crumbling

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and gapped. Its towers ominously lean; and some of them are mere piles of rubbish already. The gates — so unhinged and broken are they — invite attack and promise to surrender at discretion. Within, the munitions of war are scanty and rude. Poorly-provisioned is it — next to nothing to eat and drink, next to nothing of sound and healthy diet for human nature. Is this a place to take refuge in? There is neither comfort nor safety in it; and when the sinner has set himself in the very heart of its citadel, the avenging Heavens will have no difficulty in reaching him. Will Unbelief keep off the day of death, or the day of judgment? Does it nourish the better nature of man, and fortify it against sin? Has it not been battered and shattered by experience and learning till it is almost uninhabitable? The Wrath to Come will take the city the very day it sits down before it. It will pluck the fugitive out of his refuge, and sweep away with him with supreme ease. God will not excuse the sinner from the penalty of His law because he has managed to persuade himself that there is no God, or no Word of God, or no penalty from God.

Hearken! The rush and glitter of the Wrath to Come fill all the air. What shall the affrighted

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sinner do? He cannot stand and calmly wait for the Doom to rush in upon and overwhelm him. Of course he must flee. But whither? There is a city close by whose name is Forgetfulness? Thither he will go and be at ease. As he goes he finds himself keeping company with a large part of his friends and neighbors. They enter the gate, and forget the Wrath to Come. They rush to business, and forget; they rush to pleasure, and forget; they rush to society, to reading, to almost any means of diverting attention, and forget — forget that they are liable every moment to be overtaken and overwhelmed by the judgments of God.

What sort of a City of Refuge is this? I must admit that it is populous. I must admit that it has a better look than Unbelief. I must admit that the people in it seem to consider themselves safe. At the same time it is plain to see that the place is always enveloped in a dense unhealthful smoke that totally shuts off Heaven from view, and confuses the motions of its people as they go hither and thither. In forgetting the justice of God, in forgetting such things as death and eternity and the judgment-day and everlasting destruction, sinners have to forget God Himself

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and the Bible, and the true state of their own character; have to be without all styles of religious meditation and conversation and reading, all true praying and hearing of the Gospel and hearkening to Providence. In short, they walk in darkness. They grope for the wall as the blind; they grope as if they had no eyes. No matter, however, if safety is bought by the sacrifice of light. Are these citizens of Forgetfulness safe? Have its smoky gates and walls and towers the ability to screen its inmates from the Wrath to Come? Not for one moment. To forget danger is not to remove it. The sanctions of God's broken law will make their way through the heaviest intrenchments of Forgetfulness as if they were frost-work or dreams, and will smite the sinner in the very core of his refuge. It is no refuge at all save just a little while from fear. The *things* to be feared march steadily on — "They shall run like mighty men, they shall climb the wall like men of war, they shall run to and fro in the city, they shall climb upon the houses, they shall enter into the windows as a thief."

In this open country, exposed on every side, with the tramp and rush of Eternal Judgments terrifying all the air, no sinner with eye and ear

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open can remain at ease, awaiting what will happen. He must flee. But whither? Not far away is a city called Divine Decrees. He concludes to run thither; and, on reaching it, he finds that not a few other sinners have sought quiet in the same place. And they say to themselves and to one another: "God has from everlasting decreed the fates of all men. No efforts of theirs can alter the character of their eternity by a single hair. If they are to escape the Wrath to Come, they will escape it, let them do as little as they may. If they are to be overwhelmed by it, they will be overwhelmed, let them do as much as they can. What is the use of alarm and exertion?" So they make the Decrees of God a refuge — are glad to quietly settle down in a city of such venerable and Scriptural aspect. They lease houses in it for an indefinite period.

What ought to be said of this City of Refuge? Let us say that it is a real, a strong, an ancient, an indestructible city. No enemy can ever destroy or subjugate it. Further, it is a favorite city with God and good men; and the best of men in every age have found great satisfaction in going to it. The impenitent sinners who establish themselves there do wear an aspect of calmness,

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— often *gloomy* calmness, it must be confessed — and sometimes of stony, or even smiling, indifference. They are no longer palpitating with alarm. Altogether it is a famous, majestic, and admirable city ; and in it one sees not a few faces that are serenely happy and confident in their expression. But it is no place of safety from Divine Justice. Sinners may find refuge here from disturbance of mind, but they will find none from the Law and its Penalty. It is God's own city ; and His judgments enter its gates, and walk its streets, and search all its dwellings, without the slightest hindrance. He will not have to batter it down in order to get at His rebellious subjects. That God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass will never stand in the way of the Wrath to Come ; it will rather help its tremendous onset.

"What say you to Personal Merit as a refuge? I must flee somewhere — these dreadful forebodings of conscience and threats of Scripture, these glitters and tramps of eternal retributions that increasingly crowd upon me, cannot be endured. Yes, I must flee somewhere — why not to this near city of Personal Merit?" So he runs thither — and not without company. Many take refuge from their fears in the thought that they compare

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favorably with many others. They are not like yonder great criminals, accused of God and men: no gross vices and crimes can be laid to their charge; they confessedly have many good and amiable, not to say shining, traits. Correct, useful, reputable — undeniable acquisitions to any community — are all that company now calmly resting within the gates of Personal Merit. Behind its intrenchments and under the shadow of its towers, their fears are gone. They hear but faintly, if at all, the ominous tramp of the Wrath to Come. Surely God will not allow *them* to become food for destruction!

As to this much-resorted-to Refuge, I can hardly give a more pleasing account of it as a city to live in, and to be safe in, than I have given of others. Many of its towers and fortifications, as seen by those sinners, are mere dream-land: they exist only in the fancy. Sinners are apt to give themselves credit for forms and degrees of excellence, positive and negative, which they do not have. Really the city is very small, and poorly situated, and badly built; and, especially in its central part, exceedingly decayed, crumbling, and unsteady. It is subject to sudden alarms. Every now and then every building in the city will sud-

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denly fall a trembling, and seem ready to topple down on the heads of the people. At midnight, perhaps, they are startled from their slumbers by a mighty shock; and, rushing abroad, they find the bells tolling by unseen hands, the ground tossing like the sea, and their dwellings nodding and pitching upon them from every direction. And, sure as destiny, the Wrath to Come will at last arrive before the walls; and, though they were a thousand times stronger than they are, will breach and carry them with irresistible momentum. Not a sinner will escape. Never will a soul be found with sufficient righteousness of its own to save it. Whatever quiet one may get by betaking himself to the idea of Personal Merit, he is certain to get no safety. Our righteousnesses are but filthy rags; much less are they adamantine fortifications, stout and lofty enough to stop the pursuit of the Avenger.

All this many sinners understand. They never think of taking refuge in Personal Merit. But they must have a refuge of some kind — when Sinai lightens so fearfully, when an infinite penalty makes the ground quake under them with its thunders, when death, judgment, and eternity are heard whetting their glittering sword. The choice

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is to flee to the General Mercifulness of God — that stronghold, that great and shining city set on a hill, and visible all over Christendom. They know that God has a strong disposition to help, and save, even the most guilty. They hear Him proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." They hear Him say, "God is Love." And they flatter themselves that such an overwhelming mercifulness will, sooner or later, find some way of keeping them from the jaws of destruction. They have nothing to say of their own goodness — only, God is a miracle of mercy. They have nothing to say, or feel, of sorrow for the past, and of intending to lead a new life — only, God is a miracle of mercy. So their fears are quieted. Hurrying within the gates, they see the goodly proportions, and noble architectures, and mellow glories of this Divine city rising and shining all around them, and they say, Lo, we are forever safe.

"What can you say against this City of Refuge?" Nothing at all against the *city*. It is not an air-castle. It is not made up of clouds marshaled by the winds and embellished by the sunset. It is a real, fair, most splendid and ad-

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mirable metropolis. It has no superior anywhere. Mere glimpses of its winsome glory make the faces of wise men shine. The reflection of it from other objects gives them their chief beauty and charm. No, nothing but eulogy can we utter when speaking of the glorious Mercifulness of God. Incomparable city! Light and delight of Heaven and earth! We bless thee. But good as it is as a city, it is poor as a refuge. It will do for a while as a refuge from fear, but it amounts to nothing as a refuge from punishment. The mere Mercifulness of God never yet saved a sinner. Divine Justice is accustomed to follow sinners that have fled into the very heart and citadel of this city, and to consume them there. The gates are ajar. Not a shadow of opposition is offered. The kind heart of God is not disposed to gratify itself at the expense of His kingdom. So the Avenger sweeps forward, without a mote of hindrance, through gate and over wall, till it finds and slays its victim, hidden though he be in the very inmost pavilion of his chosen city. He lies stretched on the golden pavement. His glassy eyes gaze sightless into the fretted and gemmed dome of his gorgeous sanctuary.

Look around! Here is a city, fair and large

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and fortified — call it Resolutions of Future Amendment. Yonder is another of even still better and stronger appearance — call it Partial Reformation. You can see at a glance that both these places are favorite cities of refuge to men chased by the Avenger of blood. These cities, and the ways leading to them, are populous with refugees. They caught glimpses of the terrible Wrath to Come; the fierce glitter of that armed tempest was approaching; the sound of a host rushing to battle grew apace on their ears; and they fled, fled, saying, "I will surely repent some day. When this enterprise is finished, or that revival comes, or such a period of life is reached, then I will become a Christian." And others fled, saying, "I renounce a part of my sins; from this time I am a reformed man as to such and such of my misconduct" — and straightway various improvements are noted in them. Now they are quiet. It seems to them as if they had propitiated the enemy, or for the time had taken themselves out of its way. They have taken refuge — some in the city of Good Resolutions, and others in the city of Good Performances.

Miserable Refuges! Good *cities* but poor *refuges*. In them sinners may lose their fear, but

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they do not lose their danger. The Wrath to Come will not be checked one minute before the gates of either of them. Ten thousand times has it chased men, and struck them down, along the very selectest streets, and within the inmost abodes and citadels, of these favorite and well-appearing strongholds. Let the truth be told — there is not one particle of safety in them. They were never appointed to be refuges from Divine Justice, and they have never answered as such. But they *have* answered to delude men by multitudes into a sense of safety that has proved fatal to them. The time they have spent in hiding under the lee of these deceitful walls might have carried them into the heart of another City, roomy enough to hold them all, near enough to be reached by all, plain enough to be seen by all, and strong enough to defend all — even against so mighty a pursuer as the Wrath to Come.

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XV.

JESUS THE SUBSTITUTE.

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XV.

JESUS THE SUBSTITUTE.

A MAN is to die. Only one thing can save him. Some one must consent to take his place. Will any do that hard thing? Can a person be found to volunteer into the place of the sentenced criminal, and be beheaded in his stead? Is there one in the full life-boat, just pushing off from the wreck, who will give up his place to the poor man who stretches out hands from the sinking ship, and will consent to go down with that ship in his stead?

Yes, very possibly there is some one who will consent to undertake this tremendous proxy. Such things have actually happened many times. The servant of the Grand Vizier of 1769, seeing a pistol aimed at his master, suddenly threw himself before him and received the fatal charge in his own body. Caius Gracchus, hotly pursued by his enemies, crosses the Sublician bridge. Its weight in gold is offered for his head: and he will certainly lose it, unless his two friends gain him five

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minutes of time by taking their stand at the narrow bridge-entrance, and fighting the tide of pursuit till they die. They determine to do it. In that narrow pass, they hold the armed host at bay; and freely fling away their lives as a ransom for his. Leonidas and his three hundred set themselves to keep the straits of Thermopylæ. They expect to die, they know they shall die, they have come for that very purpose — for what can these few do against the Persian million! They deliberately propose to lay down their lives for the lives of their countrymen — to show the invader what sort of a people he has to deal with, and to strike an enervating terror into his heart for all future conflicts. So, in that narrow pass, one by one, to the last man, they frankly and mightily fling their lives in the face of the invader, as so much ransom for the lives of their countrymen.

There are so many instances of this sort on record, that, when it is asked, "Will any step forward voluntarily to take the place of this doomed man, and be beheaded or drowned in his stead," we are obliged to confess that the thing is very possible. Do not set it down as incredible that some one under these trying circumstances should

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present himself and sincerely say, "I will die for him;" and then cheerfully clasp the fatal block, or go down with the sinking ship. Judging from the past, the feat might be done under the power of any one of a *number* of leading motives.

For example, it may be done under the influence chiefly of *an epic physical courage.* Some persons have a constitutional hardihood and insensibility to danger; a natural contempt for mere physical pain, and natural relish for great feats and astonishing adventures. As the columns file down into battle notice the difference between soldiers. This man — the color has all forsaken his cheek, his half-closed eyelids quiver, his step is feeble and unsteady, his voice, if he has any left, is faint and broken, his mind is flurried and confused so that he hardly knows what is passing. But yonder man — how different! What perfect self-possession! How free and firm his carriage — never showed its equal before. Look into his eye — how open and cool and yet comprehensively searching its glance! And if he speaks, how clearly and steadily and coldly, and yet with a half-concealed epic springiness and ring, word follows word! What means this striking difference? It means a difference of natural constitu-

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tion. It means that the natural element of the one is a peaceful common way of life, while the natural element of the other is feats, adventures, and storms. Now, this last style of man, with only a very common measure of generosity and other principles, such as may be supposed favorable to self-sacrifice, might rise to the pitch of dying for that doomed man. He has a natural appetite for such feats ; just as some men have for the strongest and spiciest and most concentrated kind of food. He could die in this great thunderclap manner about as easily as most persons live in a common quiet way. And, methinks, I see him stepping calmly forward in the strength of his iron and featy nature, saying, "I will die for him ;" and mounting the scaffold or boarding the wreck with the same epic coolness with which he would have marched up before an exploding cannon.

One person may die for another under the influence chiefly of *pride* — meaning by the term what is frequently meant by it, namely, a sensitiveness as to repute. Why did Hamilton accept that challenge ? Not from mere appetite for fighting, not from deadly animosity toward his opponent, but from fear of the thoughts and tongues

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of men. He thought that, if he should decline to fight, the soldiers and politicians who formed his circle would think less favorably of him as a man of spirit, courage, and honor. He fought under the impulse of a false shame, in opposition to his principles and better judgment, and in expectation of a fatal issue to himself. It was a case of deliberate sacrifice of life to pride. Now this same Alexander Hamilton, who out of sensitiveness to repute, flung away his life for nothing, could, under the influence of the same principle, have more easily flung away his life for something, say for the life of a friend or valuable citizen. Suppose the case of the life-boat had been his; and he had been put on his choice whether himself or his family should remain behind and go down in the sinking ship. Is there any doubt what his choice would have been? Had his affection for his family been of the slightest, and his personal courage in no way remarkable, his very pride would have led him to sacrifice himself. What, he allow those little ones to stretch out imploring hands, and cry despairingly to him from off the wreck, and then sink gurgling into their sea-grave, while he goes riding snugly into harbor! Unspeakable shameful-

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ness! How could he, after such despicableness, look a fellow-man in the face! How could he look his own soul in the face! Would not the sharp words and sharper thoughts of men follow him as long as he should live! But if, on the other hand, he should promptly choose to die for his family, and with his own hand push off the loaded boat from him, what a noble ending of his honorable career! How men hearing the tale would admire and venerate and celebrate him! It would not take an Alexander Hamilton, with his great soul, to choose death under the influence of such views. When the choice is between living in shame and dying in glory, many a common man of small principle and great pride could brace himself up to die for his friends.

Again, a man might die for another under the influence of simple *disgust at life.* Sometimes men get wearied at living. Their losses have been so severe, their disappointments so cutting, perhaps their *ennui* so complete, that they would be glad to get rid of life on any respectable terms, sometimes on terms that are not respectable. Deliberate suicides happen in great number every year. Rather than not die immediately men dare to defy God, and become self-murderers. "Can-

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not you wait a little? You are sure to die before long — why not bide your time?" "No, no! cannot wait an hour"— and so the man is found next morning hanging from the bough of a tree. To such persons an opportunity of going out of life in a righteous and splendid sort of way would be a godsend. Let a just war arise, and you shall see them joyfully accept the forefront of the battle, and volunteer on the forlorn hope. Where the shots fall most thickly, where battalions charge most fiercely, where the dying and dead lie like the stalks of a reaped grain field, there they rush, not in a spirit of martial and heroic enthusiasm, as spectators may suppose, but in sheer weariness of life to find in an honorable way their fate. Or, suppose they stand by a scaffold on which good men are about to die unless some volunteers can be found to die for them, or, suppose they float by the side of a wreck on which good men are about to drown unless some volunteers from the full life-boat will consent to drown for them. Is there any doubt what they will do? They will spring upon that scaffold, saying, "Behold, here are we, *we* will die in the room of these men" — they will leap out of that life-boat upon the sinking deck, saying, "Haste, take our places, we will go down

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with the ship in your stead:" and while beholders look on with wet eyes and swelling hearts, as if gods had come down on earth in likeness of men, those willing proxies themselves are conscious that they deserve no credit whatever; since disgust at life is felt to be their motive, and they are only flinging away for something honorable what they would gladly fling away for nothing and less than nothing.

One may die for another out of *love*. I well remember the words of my own mother, "I wish I could be sick for you;" and had she known it to be a sickness unto death, I am convinced it would have made no difference. She would have taken my place all the same. Nor would it have been a very extraordinary case. Many a weak, timid mother would clamor at the gates of death for the privilege of dying for her child, were such things permitted. There was many a soldier lately in the field whose mother would gladly have covered his body with her own. Many a soldier now fills a soldier's grave whose mother when the sad news came, and long after, said in her heart, "O Absalom, my son, my son, would to God I had died for thee!" And not mothers only can furnish examples of such mighty, death-conquer-

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ing affection. It glows in not a few bosoms towards persons bound to them by no ties of blood; and, perhaps, were the scaffold standing for you, or the sinking ship were about carrying you down, you know of some one whose heart is not inspired by any instinct of blood-relationship, but who for all that could freely say, "I will die for him," and would lay bare neck on block or leave the life-boat for your sake. That volunteer for you may naturally be very timid, have but a very moderate share of pride and ambition, be exceedingly attached to life, and yet for love of you it is easy to die. Thank God, human nature is capable of such a feat as this! It makes one's bosom thrill with a strange pleasure to feel that, amid the manifold meannesses of human society, a capacity for affection and self-sacrifice so glorious and sublime may be found. One may die for another out of disgust of life, may die out of an abounding courage, may die out of the still higher principle of a sensitive regard to character, may die out of a principle vastly nobler still, namely, a love stronger than death which many waters cannot quench or floods drown; and let Heaven be praised that, on opportunity, earth would furnish more instances of the last sort of death than of any other.

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I carry my enumeration but one step further. One may die for another out of love and principle *together*. Your friend may give up to you his place in the life-boat both because he loves you more than tongue can tell, and because he feels it righteous to do so. He feels it best for all parties that he should be the one to die; his own death will involve fewest sacrifices to God and man; he can be spared better by the family, the community, and the cause of Christ — his sense of duty clearly beckons him out of the life-boat. And so strong is that sense, so accustomed is he to obey it, that, were you no dear friend of his, he might still pluck up heart and bravely say, "God's will be done; I will do my duty at all costs; though I die will I not remove my integrity from me," and then calmly step upon the sinking deck as you step into the life-boat. But, in point of fact, his affections are as active in that act of self-sacrifice as his conscience. At the same moment that his principle looks death in the face and says in his behalf, "I will die for him," his heart looks death in the face and says, "And I will die for him." Either is strong enough to carry him forward to the sacrifice; but, really, one takes him by one hand, and the other by the other, and so

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together gracefully lead him to his fate. And this is by far the noblest and sublimest scene of all; for of all natural qualities and motives there is none so glorious as a disinterested and mighty love, and of all qualities whatsoever, none has such royal dignity as unswerving, unconquerable, moral principle. The two together are a double-star, burning and throbbing in the center of a crystal, and together make the matchless wedding of the fairest thing on earth with the best thing in Heaven. No sovereign contempt of life, no epic courage, no delicate sense of honor, no profound affection could die for you in such a blaze of admirable and touching exhibition as is witnessed when mighty Love and mighty Principle, each stronger than death, the fairest angel below the skies and the fairest angel above, climb your scaffold and say with one voice, "We will be beheaded for him," or together spring upon your sinking deck and say, "Away to the life-boat, we will be drowned in your stead."

And now I ask your attention to this last and noblest style of dying for another as being that which Jesus has shown for us. We were condemned to die. The scaffold was erected, and the axe, sharp and glittering, hung over our necks.

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The ship was a wreck, and was about carrying us down. Then Jesus volunteered to die for us. He would take our wretched place on the scaffold, in the ship. He was not wearied of His heavenly life. He had no dishonor to fear should He leave us to do our own dying. No spirit of reckless daring and adventure possessed Him. But He did *love* us, oh, how intensely! No human heart ever yearned and burned with such passionate tenderness as He felt for us. *Die* for us! — He could have died millions of such deaths as we see about us. But He had another element within Him equally magnificent and powerful, namely, *principle* — an immeasurable taste and determination for doing right. He saw it right that God should be honored and man saved by the substitution of His own death for that of men. And had He not loved us at all, He yet could have died for us as a sacrifice to what was right and best. But, in point of fact, in offering to die for us, and in actually dying, He was under the influence of both these magnificent motives — of the magnificent love and the magnificent principle. Both led Him to the Cross: it was by the elastic uplift of both that He leaped on our scaffold of decapitation — on our sinking ship

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Thus far, however, the death of Christ for us only appears as one instance of that best sort of death for others of which the world furnishes many examples. To be sure, there is no comparison between the *degree* of that love and principle which led Jesus to die for man, and the degree of them which sometimes leads one man to die for another. But there are other features of the case that lift the sacrifice of Christ for us far above all such earthly fellowship and competition. Man has died for man, has died for him in a spirit of mingled love and principle; but when did man ever die *such* a death as Jesus undertook? The life-boat He stept out of was Heaven — the niche in the life-boat which He stept out of was the bosom of God. The wreck on which He leaped was the fortune of an impenitent sinner; and the abyss into which He sank was the abyss of that Divine wrath due to the sins of mankind. All this was borne, not for loving friends but for enemies; not for the good but for the evil; not for the thankful but for the unthankful recipients of innumerable blessings; not by the unconscious elements of Nature but by the rejoicing hands of the very persons for whom He died. The very persons for whom He made place in the

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life-boat proceeded, amid mockeries and various insults, to scuttle the ship with their own hands. He knew from the beginning that it would be so. He consented to die in full view of all the circumstances — to die that leviathan death whose peer never was seen, by whose side all other sorrows and pains dwindle into nothing, and whose sighs are sharp with eternal sorrow. What a proxyship was that! What mole-hills are all other substituted deaths compared with this mountain whose base fills a world, and whose summit touches Heaven! Do we think it noble, magnificent, deserving of immortal renown, when a man steps freely forth to die our poor, common, dwarfish death for some dear amiable friend who cannot be so well spared as himself? What should we say, then, when Jesus steps freely forth to die His great death in behalf of wicked and ungrateful enemies, and by their own hands! Was there ever feat like this? O theme worthiest of bard and orator; worthiest of amazement and imperishable fame from man and angel; worthiest of that song that swells eternally like the noise of many waters and mighty thunderings against the sapphire dome of Heaven — "Worthy the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom

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and strength and honor and glory and blessing; for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation!"

Shall we slight Him who has so died for us? Now that He has passed through our great agony, and comes back with pleading eyes asking for our love in return, shall we withhold it? He holds up His hands. He uncovers His side. He looks into our eyes with unutterable yearnings that say, "*Will* you — *Can* you?" No, Lord Jesus that died for us, we cannot. We cannot be so monstrously hard of heart. Are we stone? Are we adamant? Have we no heart at all, but in its place a lump of ice, that after He has laid His neck beneath the axe of Divine Justice for us and taken for us its tremendous blow, that after He has taken our place in the sinking ship and actually gone down as our substitute to the very bottom of the tempestuous and drowning abyss of heavenly wrath we can say Him *nay*, to any request He can make! No, No — a thousand times No. He shall have our love, our eternal gratitude. We ought to be willing to *die* for Him — we will *live* for Him. Lord, what wilt thou have us to do? We repent, we believe; we dedicate ourselves in

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love to Him who first loved us and gave Himself to die for us. Henceforth sacrifices in His service and for His honor shall be easy: henceforth our lives shall be an altar unto Him — perpetually smoking with the incense of our affections, our praises, and our obedience.

Will *you* not do the same? Behold your true City of Refuge!

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XVI.

THE MAJESTIES OF THE CROSS.

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XVI.

THE MAJESTIES OF THE CROSS.

A CROSS! Not a cross of precious metal, studded with gems, and flashing in midday sunlight — not even a cross of iron, or of marble, or of rare wood richly carved by the hand of a master — but a cross of common, rough-hewn, uncomely timber. It stands in a rude hole, rudely wedged up with stones. It has been pierced in three places as by spikes, and at each place the wood is deep red with blood. Also, the ground beneath is soaked and gory.

It is not every cross that seems to me sublime. I do not know of but one that does; and that is this rough, splintery, blood-stained Cross from which has just been taken down the lifeless body of Jesus Christ. I know that both Jew and Gentile look on it with mingled loathing and disdain; and see in it nothing more than a bloody badge of crime, slavery, and dishonor. I know that criminals the worst in character and meanest in condition have been wont to meet their fate on just

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such a thing as this; and that Pilate the Roman, and Caiaphas the Jew, would say that in every point of view this rough, ragged, wooden Cross is meanness itself. Still, to me it is the sublimest of visions. And it ought to be to every beholder. All hail, glorious Cross of the Lord Jesus! — the more glorious the longer seen. There is majesty in thy white and sky-piercing peaks and ranges, O Alps — majesty in thy great swing and stormy anthem, O Ocean — majesty in thy broad arch and hosty eternal stars, O Heaven — but there is no majesty like thine, O simple wooden, rough-scored, splintery, gory Cross, from which dead Jesus of Nazareth has just been taken down.

And David said, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate." Then three warriors buckled on their harness, broke through the host of Philistines, and brought him the water. But David would not drink it — it seemed too sacred a thing for the use of even an anointed monarch. He saw the precious lives of those champions in the cup. The blows they had stricken; the risks they had taken; the long, laborious, battling way by which they had gained for him that cool delicious draught — all rose up before him; and he felt that such

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water was a sacred and sublime thing which no human lips should touch, but which should be poured out in solemn libation before God. Had that water reached him through a still longer and mightier course of labors and sacrifices; had an army of champions, instead of three, gone forth on the adventure; had they been forced to battle their way for days instead of hours, and for leagues instead of rods; had they been made to struggle to and from that well through such legions as followed Charlemagne and his Paladins instead of through the banded war powers of little Philistia —then David would have looked on the cup of water held out to him by his worn and battered and blood-stained heroes as a still more touching and sublime thing. The mightier preparation of that cup would have put a still more thrilling sacredness into it.

Now look at the cup of salvation offered us — in whose depths lies pictured the Cross of Jesus Christ! Think what a long course of great movements prepared the way for it, and actually brought it to us. Far back of the world's birthday, and indeed of the birthdays of all worlds, behold blazing the fixed star of God's eternal purpose! With man and his sin came the in-

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stitution of sacrifices; the first instalments of revelation; the separation of the Jews; the establishment of the Mosaic Economy of types and shadows; all along at least four thousand years an ever increasing beam of religious knowledge by angels and inspired teachers; at last the birth of Jesus and His wonderful life, introduced and flanked by astonishing miracles. All these were so much preparation for the Cross. They all went to make it what it was and what it is: and without the leading things among them there could have been no Cross of Jesus Christ at all. That long drawn course of mighty preliminaries was to it what the stringing of a bow, the fitting of the arrow to the string, the bending of the tough yew, the bringing it to the ear, the aiming, the sudden quitting hold of the feathered shaft, is to the mark in the very center of which the arrow at last stands quivering. See the years and events in mighty procession sweeping on toward Calvary! See revelations and miracles and institutions, see prophets and monarchs and lawgivers and angels, slowly hewing out and putting together that wooden Cross of Jesus! See the work laboriously going on under such hands for more than forty centuries until at last it sinks into

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its socket and holds up in mid-air the body of Christ our Atonement! In the light of such a preparation as this the Cross takes on a sacred majesty. The augustness of the preparation passes over to the thing prepared. As I see the great Forerunner looking forth with shaded eyes into the near future; and then baring his princely brow, and bowing low his stately form, and uttering halleluias of salutation and welcome in voice as ocean grand — *I* say, O great Cross!

Coming to the Cross itself — the idea which it naturally first suggests is that of *suffering*. Here have been spikes, driven through hands and feet. Here the body has hung and writhed and died, hour after hour. And here too — more than all — Thou, O God, hast forsaken the victim, and saying, Awake O sword against the man that is my fellow, hast keenly cut with it through all the sensibilities of the soul. What know we of suffering! Let not the most sorely tried man that ever groaned and wept among us dare speak of his trials in the presence of the Cross. Here is suffering whose figures go out right and left infinitely. High heaven! — thou art not higher. Deep hell! — thou art not deeper. Neither feet nor wings nor mortal thought can compass the

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great mountain pain that yet hung firmly on the poor wooden Cross. Any pain is touching — pain, standing like Vesuvius, rifted and blasted with its own agony, base on earth and head in heaven, is dreadfully sublime. Especially if we view it as the *sinless* suffering of incarnate Deity. All our suffering is mixed up with guilt: but that which wrung on the iron pivots of Jesus' Cross was not humbled by such an element. All our suffering is that of worms: but that which hung by martyred hands and feet from the Cross of Jesus, in its supreme throes and clutches, took fast hold under the royal mantle of eternal Godhead. Say, was it not fearfully majestic and sublime — that atoning torture that ached and quivered and almost leaped on the red dripping spikes of Calvary — that mortal expiating agony into the abysmal Profound of whose eye all other agonies looked and shrank affrighted and called themselves joys, and which saved the creature only by leaving the print of its torn hand on the starry robe of the Supreme Creator!

One looks at the suffering of Jesus' Cross and is astonished at its giant magnitudes and alliances. Let him be equally astonished at the way that giant suffering was taken. Jesus took it upon

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Him of *freest choice.* No compulsion shouted sternly to Him from above or from beneath. He did not fall the struggling victim of a tremendous conspiracy between hell and earth and Heaven; but He came to that great suffering self-moved; came to it on wings; came to it and laid its thorny bosom against His, and pressed it to His heart — not without a certain quivering and shrinking of the human in Him as the sharp points entered His flesh, but still with all the free soul within Him lovingly choosing the mighty self-sacrifice. And now that the great sorrow has Him fast locked in its embrace and writhing on its sharp points — now that He hangs on His volunteer cross on the hill-top with death in His eye, and death in His heart, and mocking human fiends around Him (drawing off and emptying on Himself, like some safety rod, all the tremendous artillery of the skies) — oh, mark His Divine silence; His Diviner word to the poor wretch at his side; His, if possible, still Diviner prayer for His murderers, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do! Here is another sublimity for you — a sublime *manner* of suffering added to a sublime quantity and quality of it. The suffering was king, no doubt: now mark ye how it has also the

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mien and carriage and robes of a king. The suffering was oceanic, no doubt: now mark ye when the storm is on that ocean how majestically march its billows, and sound its trumpets, and wave its banners of cloud and sheeted foam!

What was the *object* of Jesus' Cross? Why stands that rude upright, with its two rude horizontal arms, on the summit of the little Calvary — dripping, dripping, with the noblest blood that ever agonized its way out of any heart? There is at least one word whose measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. That word is Salvation. Lo, the mighty object for which the Cross of Jesus stands wet with a bloody rain! To save men from immortal sin and sorrow; to lift them, soul and body, to everlasting thrones of goodness, felicity, and glory — it was for this that the executioner Cross was planned, and hewed, and loaded with its Divine Martyr. Think of it, all ye ransomed past and present! Think of it, all ye futures, stretching never so far! Think of it — all sins and sorrows in offer and possibility rooted out, and all virtues and joys in offer and possibility planted for all and forever — is not such an end as this sublime? This is what the Cross of Jesus meant to accomplish. It aimed at

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this mark with more careful and magnificent precision than ever sat on the arrow of most famous archer shooting for his life. Let the angel who with his golden reed measured the New Jerusalem above — the city, the gates, and the wall thereof — let that celestial computer, with his winged feet and golden furlong-wand, alone attempt to give us the dimensions of that great object for which Christ died. Like the City of God, its length and breadth and hight, are equal; and the figures for each are — *unspeakable.*

While the Cross was preparing, while it yet stood dripping with its tremendous atonement, it was noticed by only a small part of mankind, believed in and loved by still fewer. But even then, outside of men, that poor wooden Cross, from which flashed not a single jewel of worldly pageantry, was drawing upon itself the admiring, revering, loving glances of innumerable beings — glances which like the painted rays of sunset were a glory themselves and glorified the object on which they fell. The Supreme Father looked forth with all His infinite heart. After Him, straining over all Heaven's battlements, looked Heaven's myriad glittering children, native and adopted; and never had those bright-eyed specta-

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tors, through all the starry procession of their years, seen anything to their thought half so wonderful, so beautiful, so majestic, so touching, as the atoning Cross of Jesus. And since then great numbers of men have learned to take the same view of it. From the apostles and early martyrs down to ourselves, the gory Cross of Jesus has been the center to which have gravitated all devout Christian eyes and hearts. How saints have wondered at it, trusted it, revered it, loved it! What sore sacrifices have they made for it! They have lived for it, and died for it. They have made for it in their inmost heart a shrine: out of all things most precious and beautiful have they made it; and there, in socket of gold and diamond, they have set up that poor, wooden, homely, dripping Cross and stood uncovered before it, as if in presence of Heaven itself. Yes, multitudes of hearts, living and dying, on earth or in Heaven, have *emptied* themselves on that wonderful Cross of Jesus: and let me say to you, my friend, that the outpour of such a wealth of heart from God, angels, and saintly men on any object is enough to make it sublime.

On the one hand all beautiful and glorious emotions have from the beginning been pouring

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in deep broad streams on the Cross: and on the other hand all dark and dreadful emotions and actions have been doing the same. Satan and his have always gazed at it about as fiercely as fiends can. The Jews as a people hated it bitterly and always. The Romans hated it, and in ten general persecutions followed it with fire and sword. The pens and mouths of modern opposers have been, and still are, so many craters belching out on it the lava of their hatred and abuse. It is really fearful to see the intense bitterness that blazed away at white heat in the writings and speech of such men as Paine and Voltaire against the great symbol of the Christian faith. Enmity so deep, violent, and implacable has a frightful sublimity about it, and reflects a lurid and painful majesty on its object. And not altogether a painful majesty. One thinks how inconsumable the Cross has proved in the hot focus of these hates. One thinks what a Cross it is that not only remains unhurt by such Greek fires, but grows in weight and splendor from age to age. And one thinks, too, that for even its deadliest human foes this Cross is doing its best. O amazing love of God! O sublime Cross which no persecution can destroy, and whose sweetness no sourness can embitter!

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Such is the Cross which makes it possible for God to offer sinners conditions of salvation. It is atonement for sin. It is availing sacrifice for guilty souls. If received in a certain way it satisfies Divine justice just as well as would the ruin of the sinner. Now he can enter Heaven as freely as if he had never done a wrong thing. God's feeling against sin has been worthily expressed, the dignity of the law upheld, and now Divine mercy can flow out to guilty men in unhindered stream. A substitute has been found. Glorious substitution! Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world!

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XVII.

RECONCILIATION THE FIRST THING.

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XVII.

RECONCILIATION THE FIRST THING.

THE Gospel plan in regard to men proposes *three* things: first, their reconciliation with God; second, their holy life; third, their salvation. These are the things, and this is the order of them. In no case is a single one of these elements left out, in no case is any addition made to them, in no case are they allowed to change places among themselves.

This Scriptural scheme of progress, with its great trinity of particulars and inexorable order of them — engrossed in blazon and capitals though it be — gets strangely misunderstood and tampered with by many persons. Some insist on seeing only the last of the three particulars. They declare that, put the Scripture in whatever light they may, and strain their eyes upon it as carefully as they may, they can detect nothing but the one word, *Salvation*. "All will be saved. No foregoing process is essential; but all may leap out of death, in the very act of sin, into Heaven." Others

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insist that the great lettered schedule has two things on it, and only two. Here is *Salvation;* and here, just before it, is *a good life* — nothing further. "What, do you not see one word more still — look again, surely you can spell out that *Reconciliation* that goes before both the other things in a hand quite as bold and heavy as they!" "No, we see no such word. Our doctrine is that a man is to have a good character and life, and that then he is to be saved. No reconciliation is necessary. The relation between God and natural men is not that of *enemies.* The one is simply an indulgent father — not a provoked king with uplifted sword. The others are thoughtless and weak children, erring more or less from their Father's will, but still with no campaigning bitterness and battle against Him in their hearts. Let them do better and lead a good life, and all will be well." Still others insist that though the Gospel plan includes all the three particulars of *Reconciliation, Holy Life, and Salvation,* yet this is not the order in which they should stand. "Read good life first; then reconciliation," say they. "Your eye is like the lens of the optician which reverses the true order of objects. Man must improve his character and ways, and so

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at last win his way to Divine acceptance, and last of all to salvation. Let him make himself fit to come to Christ, let him dress himself up in propitiating virtues till he is fairly clad in court costume, and then he can present himself acceptably."

In opposition to these human methods of salvation, I wish now to place distinctly before you the Divine — first, reconciliation with incensed and contending Deity; second, a good life; third, Heaven. According to the Scriptures, the natural condition of every man is one in which he is at war with God. The two stand related to each other as enemies. We begin life with a personal dislike of our Maker and His Government, as rightly conceived; we oppose His plans, neglect His messages, and break His laws — do it intelligently, resolutely, and perseveringly. We are against Him in feeling, in intention, and in act. What more is needed to make us deserving of being called enemies? And the hostility is not all on our side. God reciprocates the belligerent attitude we take. He dislikes sinners quite as much as sinners dislike Him. He hates all the workers of iniquity. He abhors them. They are an abomination to Him. They are children of wrath.

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The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. He threatens more awfully than did ever embattled army; He whets the glittering sword of everlasting punishment, and makes it ready; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, is His eternal decree and present intent. The idea very apt to be held by sinners, that their own feelings and attitude toward God are of a very friendly sort, and that His bearing toward them is merely one of paternal and pitying, though often grieved, softness, is unscriptural and a delusion of Satan.

Now it is just at this point that the Gospel makes its first effort for the restoration and salvation of fallen man. It begins with trying to shut the temple of Janus — to put an end to the war. Till this is done it will undertake nothing else. Hence it is that the ministry of the Gospel is called the ministry of reconciliation: it being the great foundation-work of the Gospel, on which it builds up all other help for man, to bring God and the sinner together in a state of peace. It is a very desirable thing to have a holy life; and, as we have seen, some persons take the ground that

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it is here the sinner is to begin his religious efforts — gradually improving his courses, until at last he reaches reconciliation as the result of such improvement. The Gospel reverses this order. It is bent on a holy life in men as strongly as can be; only its theory and plan are to reach it after reconciliation. This is the true order. A holy life has never been reached in any other, and never will be. A man proposing to live well, must, if he would succeed, first come into friendly relations with God. He cannot improve the future till he has cleared off the past. He cannot conquer the country before him until he has quieted and reconciled the country behind.

It is plain from the whole drift of the Gospel, that, in order to the salvation of the sinner, the controversy between him and God must at some time be put to rest. The man must cease to be averse to God and cease to oppose His will: and God on His part must withdraw His wrath and uplifted sword. The only question is, At *what point* in the sinner's experience does the necessary reconciliation Scripturally come in? Let us summon witnesses. Zaccheus! — once chief among the publicans, and now leaning over the battlements of Heaven — what hast thou to say touch

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ing this question? When wast thou reconciled? After thou hadst followed for some time a good Christian life, or at the very outset of such a life? And Zaccheus makes answer, "The very day I first heard the Gospel, that day salvation came to my house, and Christ accepted me as a true child of Abraham." Crucified thief! — once hung at Jesus' side, but now walking with Him in the green pastures above the stars! — when wast thou reconciled? After some more or less length of good life, or before it? And he answers, "The very day that saw me railing on the Lamb of God saw me with Him in Paradise." Saul of Tarsus, apostle and saint! — now ruler over ten cities in glory — was it after some years of a well-ordered life that Ananias came and said to thee, Brother; or was it only three days from the time when thou wast a mad persecutor of Christ and His Church? And Saul, from his throne, makes answer, "Only three days." Jailer of Philippi! — now prince on yonder high places — how was it with thee? How long after thy gratuitous cruelty in thrusting Paul and Silas into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks, did they see fit to baptize thee as a disciple? Was it after some process of Christian life, running over weeks

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or months, or was it in the same hour that saw thee an idolater and persecutor? And the jailer, turned prince, testifies, "The symbol of reconciliation was applied to me the same hour of the night that saw me asking in terror what I should do to be saved." Famous three thousand of the Pentecost! — now celestial hierarchies, all of you — was it good life first with you, or was it reconciliation? And that white-robed and yellow-sceptered multitude make haste to say, "Why, we were accepted disciples the same day that we asked, Men and Brethren, what shall we do? It was not a holy life first and then reconciliation. We were at peace with God before there was *opportunity* for holy living." And so testify all Scripture witnesses. You cannot find an example of a good life first and reconciliation afterward. The process of religious restoration always begins at the other end.

By this order of religious events in the history of the sinner some important advantages are secured. If it were possible to have a holy life first, and then reconciliation, the other order would be the easiest to us. Being reconciled, we have God's friendly aid in leading a good life to an extent not to be expected while we are enemies.

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Being reconciled, we have a greater spring and endurance in the effort to follow out a right course than we should otherwise have: a sense of being already at peace with God, and so safe, gives the impulse of cheerfulness, gratitude, and assured success to our efforts. According to this order, reconciliation first and a good life afterward, we do not have to wait for comfort and safety for a period of some length, as we should have to do were the order reversed: but we can have them in a moment, and carry them with us as so much light and strength in all our religious struggles and trials. We are also in less danger of viewing reconciliation as a matter of self-purchase than we should be if obliged to follow a good course of greater or less length in order to gain the prize.

We see one reason why so many reformations are only partial and temporary. They are not founded on reconciliation. Men set out to make improvements in their courses of life and character, as if this were the first, instead of the second, thing to be done. Instead of making a distinct and unreserved submission to God, getting His pardon for the past, enlisting His positive friendship in their favor, and then from this point going on to the effort to build up a good life, they

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just reverse this Gospel order, and before long there is a breaking down of the whole enterprise. They run well, so far as outward observances go, for a while; but alas, it soon appears that there is a want of something. Their duties are mere shells which a puff of temptation blows away. They are found to have no sound, comprehensive conscientiousness about them — yoking them to hard and unpleasant duties as well as to the easy and agreeable. The fact is, they began to build at the top instead of the bottom. They undertook to have a house built from the outside, and without foundation and frame. If they had begun with a profound view of themselves as engaged in a *personal controversy with God*, enemies to Him and having Him for an enemy, and, leaving everything else, had betaken themselves to the task of being *reconciled* to Him, a good, thorough Christian life would have grown up out of this reconciliation as naturally as a tree out of its sound root.

It is all wasted time and effort — that spent by any person in trying to bring impenitent men to a Christian course of life by direct inculcation of a good life in general, or of particular duties in succession. Could I paint the advantages of these

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things, and the disadvantages of their opposites, with the zeal, skill, and eloquence of an angel, yet nothing would come of it. This is not the way to reform men. It would be of service to Christians who have already the root of the matter in them: but for those who have still to begin a good life, it would do nothing whatever. A Christian life is not like an open common which people can enter at any point they please. Invite the villagers by crier to come into that unfenced field, and lo, they come streaming into it from east and west, north and south — entering at any point where they happen to be. Sinners cannot enter a holy life in this way. There is a *gate* to it, and but one. Men must enter through this, or not enter at all. And this gate is reconciliation. It is to this one point that the teacher of religion is to press the feet of sinners. His burden must be, In Christ's stead I beseech you, be ye *reconciled* to God. It is only in this way he can accomplish any thorough and durable reformations.

It is a mission of reconciliation on which I am sent to you — child of this world! My object is not, primarily, to make you better, but to close a *war*. You are a child of wrath. You are, whether you know it or not, an enemy

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of God both in feeling and action; and God as a holy sovereign is an enemy to you. Your past life is full of unpardoned sins: and though, from this moment, you should never be guilty of another offense, still you have that fearful account in the past to settle with the abused government of God. For this, God is threatening. For this, His right hand is taking hold on judgment. For this, He is bending His bow and making ready His arrows on the string against the face of you — in the exercise of that wrath which is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Here is the great fact of your condition; and it is just here, if you will do anything for yourself, you must begin to do. There is but one message for men in your circumstances — AGREE *with thine adversary quickly whilst thou art in the way with him.* If you are trying to be better in order to be reconciled, be assured that you must be reconciled in order to be better. You are reading both philosophy and Gospel from right to left. You aspire to science before you have mastered letters. Or, if you are trying to make what you consider to be a good life answer instead of a reconciliation — not liking to admit that God and you stand related as antagonists; and liking to

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believe that your character and life are already so well-ordered as to do you no little credit in Divine as well as human sight, or at least to leave you on sufficiently good terms with that Heavenly Father who knows how to make allowances for human frailty, and who will not take his much-beset children to task very severely for omissions and shortcomings — I say, if you are trying to make a respectable life answer instead of reconciliation, let me assure you that you are wasting your labor. Your life, respectable and orderly as it is, is not good in a religious sense. There is no thorough conscientiousness at the bottom of it; it is radically selfish; it has no godliness in it. Further, on your present track you will never reach any better sort of life. Though you should live never so long you would only be getting into worse and worse moral position. And, further still, though your life now and from this time forward, be as good as the best, without the element of reconciliation it would never conduct you to salvation. The sins you *have* committed must be pardoned. The wrath due to past offenses must be put to rest. Until you get peace with God at the Cross of Jesus you do just nothing toward your salvation, or your virtue even. The Gospel has

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but one message to every impenitent sinner; and it all lies in a single word, *Reconciliation*. Its ministry, if it does anything for the sinner, must do it as a ministry of *Reconciliation*. Preaching, prayer, evangelic labors of every description, must press him to the point of *Reconciliation;* or they are mere idle gymnastics, exhausting their whole benefit on him who practices them.

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XVIII.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.

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XVIII.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.

AN atonement for sin having been made in the death of Christ, God can consistently offer sinners conditions of reconciliation. What are they?

"That He might be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. — Seeing it is one God that shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. — Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. — God gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish. — He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. — Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life. — Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

What is meant by the faith to which reconciliation with God is thus promised? Evidently, not a mere intellectual belief that Jesus was what He claimed to be; but an *influential* belief — one

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that leads men to become His practical disciples; believing all He bids them believe, and setting themselves to do all He bids them do. When the circumstances under which Jesus and His apostles spoke are properly considered, it will be seen that this practical sort of faith is what they must have meant, and what the people to whom they spoke must have understood them to mean.

The Messiah whom the Jews expected was an *anointed king*. The whole people held that to Him was to be given the throne of His father David, that He was to reign over the house of Jacob forever, and that of His kingdom was to be no end. Hence when Jesus came and called the nation to believe that He was the Messiah, they knew that in that very act He was laying claim to all the rights and dignities confessedly belonging to that character. They knew that He wished to be believed in as Christ in order to His being obeyed as such. And when He promised salvation as the reward of belief they all understood that He meant a belief that would set a man to obeying. Who of them could have fancied that Jesus would set any value at all on their faith, except as the means of leading them to honor and treat Him accordingly? When Mohammed came

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to the Arabians and offered his paradise to all believers in him, did any hearer of his suppose that a *disobedient* faith would answer, or that the prophet would care one jot for such a faith in his mission as did not lead men to treat him accordingly? Not more did the Jews on whom Jesus called for faith. It did not enter their thoughts that He was offering rewards for a bare and barren speculation which would not influence the conduct. If it did, it was in despite of many, many such contradictions as this: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

The leading character in which Jesus appeared until His death was that of a *teacher come from God.* He stood before the people as charged with a Divine message — a message of truths and laws, indorsed by miracles. So far as He secured a practical reception of this message, so far was He understood to regard Himself as having secured the object of His mission. And when He stood and proclaimed to the people, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life, it is hardly possible that a single hearer could have been so preposterous as to think that Jesus was seeking only the cold assent of the understanding, or engaging to

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lavish eternal rewards on what neither warms the heart nor reforms the life.

When Jesus sent His forerunner He sent with him this message, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When He came in person, He opened His ministry with, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And when He sent out the disciples, two by two, to preach, they went out and preached that men should repent. In short, repentance was the burden of the early Christian preaching. The people everywhere knew it as such. And when faith in Jesus was demanded of them, they knew that the demand was made with special reference to the repentance which from the beginning had been urgently sounding in their ears. What would He care for a faith that left a man as impenitent as ever?

Under the circumstances, then, Jesus must have meant, and the people to whom He spoke must have understood Him to mean, a *practical* faith in Himself — one that leads a man to actually enter on the whole Christian service. It is abundantly declared, the Bible through, that any other sort of faith is dead and worthless, as means of acceptance with God. But this suffices. It includes trust in the Savior. It includes repent-

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ance, *i. e.*, sorrow for sin and an honest purpose to forsake it. It is practically the equivalent of trust and repentance; so that these are often used interchangeably with it, both in the language of the church and in the Scriptures.

Behold the means, the *only* means, by which the sinner can lay hold of the Cross of Christ and become reconciled to God! I emphasize the word *only* because not a few persons are inclined to connect something else with faith as a means of justification — in some cases to substitute something else for it. Set it down as a sure matter that it is faith, *and nothing besides*, on which the Scriptures condition the sinner's reconciliation with God.

It is a doctrine of the Roman Church that one cannot secure peace with God without works of penance. No matter what the state of the heart may be, he must practice certain outward self-denials, mortifications, punishments, proportioned in severity to his sinfulness, as a satisfaction for it, before he can be forgiven. He must abstain from food. He must wear the sackcloth and pointed cross. He must expose himself to cold, vigils, shame. He must make a toilsome pilgrimage to the shrine of some saint, and there smite

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himself with the knotted cord, and repeat his hundreds of prayers. Only in some such way, according to the Roman scheme, can a sinner come to a reconciliation with God and an interest in the kingdom of Heaven.

In opposition to this view, Protestants have always maintained the doctrine of justification by faith *alone*. They claim, and have always claimed, that outward works, and not merely such but works of every description other than the simple act of faith, are of no direct help whatever in making our peace with God. For this purpose penances are worth nothing, moralities are worth nothing, unlimited Christian graces and gracious deeds are worth nothing. They have their uses, and some of these uses are as glorious as Heaven; but to justify the sinner before God, either wholly or in part, is not one of them. This great office is reserved for faith. It alone is the instrument by which we can lay hold on the atonement of Christ so as to make it avail for the pardon of our sins.

I have already given you some specimens of the passages in which acceptance with God is conditioned on faith. Were we to go over all the many passages that speak of the means of recon-

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ciliation, we should find nothing said about anything save faith, or its practical equivalents, such as trust and repentance. Not a word of anything else as being necessary. It is fair to conclude that nothing else is necessary. As says Paul, Wherefore I conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

In accordance with this view is the case of the thief on the cross. Surely that man is already accepted to whom it is said, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. And yet only a few moments have passed since he was reviling the Savior. He has had no opportunity for good works — no opportunity to prosecute the Christian discipleship, only to enter on it. He has only been able to renounce his sins in heart and purpose, and in heart and purpose take up the service of Christ: and it seems that this was enough to gain him acceptance. Christ did not wait for deeds of the law to follow in their lovely procession before He gave the expiring man assurance of a home in the bosom of a reconciled God. Are we to suppose that this is the only case that has ever occurred of repentance and pardon at the very close of life? No doubt death-bed conversions are rare, but that some such do occur,

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probably no one will care to question. Sinful souls, like the crucified thief, have properly begun to rejoice in the Divine favor just as they were about to launch away from the shores of time. Had anything beyond a simple renunciation of sin, and acceptance of Christ's discipleship in the heart and will, been necessary to their reconciliation with God, they could never have had such reconciliation in this world. They could show no habit of good works — not even individual instances of them. Faith was the utmost they could show as means of justification. They had *entered*, in heart and purpose, on the Christian way, but had done nothing more, when the summons came to cross the flood and be with Christ, and with him who so suddenly passed from a malefactor's character and doom into a welcoming Heaven.

This is according to the views of all the denominations called evangelical. No one supposes that pardon of sin is delayed a single moment after the sinner has truly believed, repented, trusted in Christ, been converted, been regenerated. We use various terms ; but we mean by them one and the same thing ; and we locate that thing on the appearance of which pardon promptly comes

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forth, at the very outset of the Christian discipleship. Indeed, it *is* that outset. The sinner passes the "strait gate at the head of the way," in the act of faith.

Notice what is not implied in this doctrine of justification by faith alone.

It is not implied that good works are of no value in the sight of God. The teaching merely is that they are of no value *as means of justification.* For other purposes they are inestimable. They are so many bright helps to a nobler nature and happiness in ourselves and others. God is praised by their shining. They are evidences that we have the kind of faith that justifies. They help work that faith in others. And so the Scriptures largely command us to be "careful to maintain good works for necessary uses, as being good and profitable unto men;" and every Christian sanctuary is continually resounding the command.

It is not implied that the chief reason why God has made faith the means of justification is not its tendency to produce good works. I suppose this tendency to be the chief reason. For one, I have no doubt that were faith to lose this precious quality it would at once lose the high place of honor it now holds as the minister of God's

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friendship; and that were some other voluntary act to gain what faith loses it would at once take faith's place in the economy of redemption. And yet I have as little doubt that good works other than faith are of no use whatever in procuring our acceptance with God. *To begin heartily* Christ's discipleship is the first thing, the last thing, the everything, in signing and sealing our title to eternal life.

Nor is it implied that good works are not even essential to salvation. We are to believe with all our hearts that whoever will not do good works will certainly perish. If the liar will not give himself to truth-telling, if the drunkard will not give himself to temperance, if the thief will not practice honesty, if the sabbath-breaker will not hallow the day of rest, if the swearer will not revere the name of God, if the covetous man will not quit his covetousness, if the selfish man will not quit his selfishness — they shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. If any one goes on neglecting any known duty to the end of life, he will come to endless ruin. It is common for the Scriptures to single out duties and declare, directly or indirectly, that there is no salvation without performing them.

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And yet it is true, that not one of the shining assemblage of virtues which come from faith has anything to do in justifying men. That they do not help justify does not show that they are not inseparably connected with what does justify — any more than the fact that a man's living does not give him the favor of men shows that he can have that favor without living.

The Scriptures sometimes mean by faith mere speculative belief. It is proper, where the word is used in this sense, to deny, as the Apostle James does, that faith alone justifies; and to affirm, as he does, that works in addition are necessary. This is merely saying that a justifying faith is always *practical.*

Men are strongly disposed by nature to modify the Divine plan of justification. When moralists look on their fair moralities, they are tempted to think such beauty and usefulness *must* do something toward softening in their favor the heart of God. But such an idea must not be allowed. It is dangerous. Glorious and indispensable as good works are, we must count them as having no relation to our acceptance with God as a lawgiver, further than as means, or evidences, or fulfillments of the faith that secures acceptance. Let the

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moralist think highly of his fair and useful ways — verily I say to you that he has his reward, and that they may lead him through Divine grace to become a true believer. Let the Christian value much the works of righteousness which he does — they are proofs that he has already believed to the saving of his soul. But let both remember that a man is *justified* by faith without the deeds of the law.

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XIX.

FAITH EXPRESSING ITSELF IN THE GREAT DECISION.

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XIX.

FAITH EXPRESSING ITSELF IN THE GREAT DECISION.

WHAT religion consisted in under the Old Dispensation is easily discovered. It consisted in "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God;" in "serving the Lord;" in "obeying the voice of the Lord;" in "remembering His commandments to do them;" in "keeping His statutes and judgments." An ancient Jew, who conscientiously set himself to do and be whatever God wished, was reckoned a good man; and God, in passages of the Old Testament too numerous to mention, promised to stand his friend under all circumstances.

As little doubt is there as to how religion *began* in men in Old Testament times. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord who will have mercy upon him." "When I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, if he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right; if the

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wicked restore the pledge, give again that which he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, he shall surely live." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." "Turn ye to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious: who knoweth if He will return and leave a blessing behind Him?" "Therefore now mend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you." Accordingly, when the Jews, or the Ninevites, or individual sinners from among them, regretted their sins, confessed them, asked pardon for them, and honestly set themselves to put them all away, God became reconciled to them. They entered on a new character, and into new relations with God.

Do not let any suppose that religion is a different thing now from what it was under the Old Dispensation; or suppose that it begins in a different way. Goodness is not a costume — one thing in one age and another thing in another. It

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has a stable nature of its own, which it carries with it into all climates, all ages, and all persons. That which made Abraham a good man, or Job, or David, or Daniel, was the same thing that made Peter, or Paul, or Augustine, or Melancthon, or Martyn, a good man. Of course it is so — virtue is one of the unchangeables in its constitution. And men come to it in precisely the same way now they always have done. The strait gate of the New Testament is just the strait gate of the Old, without one single jot of alteration. Timbers, hinge, latch — it is one and the same thing. The ancient confessed his sins, was sorry for them, asked pardon for them, set himself honestly and universally to reformation, and so became a forgiven and righteous man ; the modern does the same thing with the same result. The ancient asked pardon through such sacrifice as was known to him ; the modern asks it through such sacrifice as is known to him — the one received pardon through the Christ that would come ; the other receives it through the Christ that has come — the one regretted and forsook such sins as an Old Dispensation showed ; the other regrets and forsakes such sins as are shown by the New Dispensation with its fuller light : but, after all,

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the gate of life to both is one thing, viz., *an influential faith in God*, one securing a full and hearty renunciation of every sin, a full decision of mind to serve God in all the ways of His appointment, whether relating to outward conduct or to states of mind.

This decision, by which men always enter the kingdom of God, is always the work of the Holy Spirit. It is, of course, real, hearty, and thorough. Not against some sins, but against all sins. Not to begin putting away sin to-morrow, but to begin immediately. Not to hold out against sin for a time — it covers the whole ground of future existence, and says, With God's help, I will never more allow myself in anything forbidden by conscience and Scripture. It is of course an intelligent decision — based on a fair understanding of what the service of God is, of the duties it requires and the sins it forbids. Such a decision as this carries with it repentance and faith and good works, and is the one gate to Heaven for all classes and generations of men — for Antediluvians and Postdiluvians, for Old Dispensation sinners and sinners of the New Dispensation, for sinners of Christendom or heathendom. It was this by which the Pentecostal thousands

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came into the kingdom ; by which the Philippian jailer became a Christian disciple ; by which Saul became Paul, and asked, Lord what wilt thou have me do ; by which a great company of priests became obedient to the faith. It was this that began religion in all the old martyrs and confessors of the church, in the venerated Protestant reformers, in our own God-fearing ancestral Pilgrims, in all present "living epistles." And it is just this decision, and nothing else, that must make *you* a Christian and regenerate person, should you ever become such.

Decide, my friend, on being such. Resolve on a universal, eternal, and immediate keeping of the commandments, with God's help and to the best of your ability. Resolve on a life of prayer. Make up your mind to a life-long cleaving to the Scriptures and all other means of grace. Declare to yourself that you will hallow sabbaths and sanctuaries and sacraments. Promise yourself that you will mortify selfishness, anger, revenge, pride, envy, deceit, covetousness, uncharitableness, and all other bad mental states. Come under contract with yourself that you will not allow yourself in intemperance, profanity, dishonesty, idleness, slander, promise-breaking, or

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any other offense against the public or private weal of men; but will, on the contrary, lead a gentle, helpful, forgiving life toward all men. Covenant with yourself that you will aim at being conscientious, public-spirited, placable, generous, a lover of good men, a lover and truster of Almighty God and His Son Jesus; that you will stand up boldly for Jesus and His religion; that you will glorify Him as you best may on the right and left; that you will be baptized in His name, and 'do this in remembrance of Him,' — in a word, that you will obey conscience and Scripture as servants of Christ, looking for salvation to Him alone. Do it with your whole heart. In this way you will appropriate the great sacrifice of Jesus and a new character.

Does this seem too small and simple a matter to be the essence of conversion, and of God's plan for saving men? "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven — the word is *nigh* thee." So nigh a thing as an intelligent and whole-hearted decision to serve Jesus in all the ways of His appointment. And by no means a small thing is this. It involves a host of particular decisions. It is really making up your mind to enter on a life-long and most laborious contest

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with easily besetting sins and all manner of sin. If you have a sin that is to you as your right hand or right eye, you must decide to give that up. An honest resolve to make the will of God the guide of life changes the whole drift and policy of that life; henceforth it has a new motive, a new direction, a new foundation, a new epoch. And then what a shining train of results this illustrious decision draws after it! As soon as the soul decides for God, He decides for the soul. The Lamb's Book of Life takes a new name. Heaven gets ready a new mansion. The soul itself receives new affections, a new character, a new birth. A decision that has such a nature, and such vast results, deserves to be called *great*. There are few things that God would call great; but doubtless this is one of the few — that decision which revolutionizes the character and prospects of a man for an eternity. There are many things that man would call great; but if he neglects to put at the head of them all, so far as they are earth-born and earth-dwelling, the decision that changes a child of Satan into a child of God, and an heir of hell into an heir of Heaven, he commits one of the wildest of mistakes and absurdities.

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We sometimes speak of conversion as a "breaking down of the will." This is proper language, but still language that needs to be guarded. The will-power is not broken down in conversion at all. There is a great change in its *direction*, but none at all, necessarily, in the force of its action. Formerly it decided strongly against the service of Christ; now it decides strongly for it, and the decision should grow stronger and stronger. A man who has become a Christian is none the less a man of resolution than before; has just as much mind of his own, is capable of just as energetic choices, is just as willful (using the term in its primary sense) as ever. Only he is resolute for holiness instead of sin, has a mind of his own to do right instead of to do wrong, energetically chooses Christ's service instead of Satan's, is set in the narrow path instead of the broad one.

How shall a man know that he has made the Great Decision? There are sources of mistake. Sad mistakes are often made. Still it seems as if one ought to be able to know whether his will is fully concluded on the service of Christ or not; and he may know by taking proper pains. He can hardly tell by comparing his experience with that of others, as to circumstantials — say, as to

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the amount of previous anxiety and struggle he has had, the amount of happiness he feels, the ease he has in doing certain Christian duties. Persons may differ widely as to all these particulars, and still all have made the great Evangelical Decision. But there is one test that is very accessible, very decisive. How does yonder man know that he has decided to go to the city immediately? If in no other way, he knows it by the fact that he is busy in the process of going. His feet are on the way, his face is in the right direction, he is traveling with might and main westward. How may the sinner know that he has truly and thoroughly made the Great Decision? Let him ask himself whether he has actually begun to be busy in the attempt to do all the various duties of the Christian service. No man has a right to be sure that he has decided on an immediate service of Christ until he finds himself actually serving Him. When he finds that he is really going toward the city he may conclude that he has decided to go. When he finds that, in point of fact, he is busy in doing all Christian duties, he may conclude that he has really decided to do them. Satan is such a deceiver that nothing short of this, combined with prayer for Divine searching, will

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answer as a test. Many a man thinks he has decided on immediate Christianity, and there he stops. Men look to see his decision pass into performance, as it would undoubtedly do if it were genuine — but they look in vain. The fact is, there is a mistake. The Great Decision is yet unmade. A mere echo and engraving of the blessing has been palmed off on the unhappy man by the adroit adversary, instead of the blessing itself. Had he truly resolved on immediate and universal obedience, the immediate and universal obedience would have followed — at least in effort and struggle.

The ancient Romans rewarded remarkable benefactors and deliverers of the State by declaring in full Senate that they had "deserved well of their country." I know a man who deserves well of himself. It is he who has made the Great Decision. Let reason and conscience, and all things within him, rise in their places and say, *Well Done!* He has delivered and founded the second time his Rome. By grace of God he has done wonders for both his eternity and time. He has solved the problem of life, and gotten a most fair and promising answer — has turned the sharp corner of his life-travel, and shall henceforth

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find it upward as well as onward. He is a saved man. Now he has a right to be happy. Now it is reasonable that he should smile and enjoy himself. Now it is no longer infatuation for him to be cool in dangers, and courageous in death, and sublimely philosophic as to all the chances of the future. He has beautifully crystallized his vaporous and fleeting opportunities, enjoyments, and interests of all sorts; and now he may hope that beautiful crystals they will remain as long as the domed heavens shall stand and echo to the praising angels. Wise man! Let all his friends congratulate him; for he has put, not only his *main chance,* but all his chances into an Ark so stanch that it can defy all the hazards of the seas, and buffet uninjured the waves and blasts of death and judgment, and ride out safely every gale that man can send or God will send:

> And when the waves of ire
> Again the earth shall fill,
> That Ark shall ride the sea of fire,
> Then rest on Zion's hill.

But *you* — ah, you are one of that large class with whom the Great Decision is yet unmade! What shall I say to you? What *can* I say, save that which you have long known as the burden of

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many a sermon, and, what is of more consequence, of many a Scripture — *the necessity for your coming to the Great Decision is extreme.* Bestir yourself. Ask for the Holy Spirit. Make up your mind on the side of Christ and His service. Let all the power of your will go forth in a sublime decree against sin. Promptly and mightily promise yourself that, with help of God, the Bible shall be the emperor of your life. No manner nor measure of waiting, no fortunate concurrence of circumstances, will ever enable you to dispense with this step. It *must* be taken. You must commit yourself. You must find some way of ending your hesitation, and of thrusting yourself down what seems to you a precipice, into the Great Decision. It may break all your bones. But by losing your life in this way you will save it. Nothing else will. And remember that it is a peculiarly precious life of which I am now speaking. The question whether you will make the Great Decision is really a question whether your soul shall live or die — whether your character and eternity shall live or die. How will you answer it? May it be so as to send a thrill of joy through the loving and lovely Heaven above — may it be so as to send a thrill of disappointment through the hating and hateful Hell below!

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XX.

THE TWO GOALS.

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XX.

THE TWO GOALS.

WE are all moving in company. The movement is swift, steady, resistless. Swiftly as the planets go — as uninterruptedly, as helplessly, as noiselessly, we pass by moments, hours, days, years. In this journey the child moves as freely as the adult ; trembling age, bed-ridden sickness, as freely as hardy and muscular manhood in its prime. The rough places and the smooth, the narrow defiles and the open country, the steep mountain slopes and the level plains, the pitchy nights and golden days, are all traversed at the same unfaltering and mighty pace. We cannot stop a single instant if we would. Though we turn our faces wishfully back on yesterday, though we grasp on the right and the left at the objects we shoot so swiftly by, yet we find it impossible to stop, or even check in the least, our flying feet. We are mere leaves scouring the highway before the blast. Prayer to a Higher Power wi'l help us about many things : but even

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prayer, however earnest and persevering, cannot help us here. It is as if some Fate has crept into our bodies and has mastered us out of the command of them, and is running us to death, over mountain and plain, through morass and flood, onward to the world's end.

Thus pressed fiercely on toward the horizon, it is natural for us to cast our eyes anxiously in the direction we are moving to see what we can discover. To what scenes and fates are we making our way? On yonder dim horizon, what is there that we should dread, or delight, to approach? Socrates and Plato, in circumstances like ours, asked themselves these questions; and, with fixed, earnest eyes looking before them far away to the extreme verge of vision, tried to make out the outlines of the misty and difficult landscape. At times they thought themselves not altogether unsuccessful. So we now look before our flying feet — fixedly, earnestly — far away to wh re t e heaven and earth come together, but where we shall be very soon, at our present whirlwind pace. Our eyes are dim and the distance is great; but is not that low cloud black beyond nature, and is there not just now a luridness lighting its lower edge? What means that long red line? And

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what are those objects (mere motes they seem at this distance) continually shooting down into it and disappearing? Can it be that they are swift-paced travelers like ourselves, falling down precipices into a miserable end, and that we are threatened with a similar fate? — But we seem to catch other glimpses. Another cloud, on the extreme of vision, under our questioning eyes appears to shape itself indistinctly into the walls and towers, the domes and pinnacles, of a beautiful city. We see nothing clearly; we would not venture to say that our weak sight is not playing us false; but are not yonder the outlines of palaces, flushed with a light so soft and rich as was never seen on the structures of earth? If so, perhaps this fair home can be the goal of our impetuous and involuntary journeying. We wish we could see more. We strain our eyes, we peer into the shadowy distance again and again, in hope of more reliable views. But in vain. We have gone the length of the natural vision. What shall we do now? In our perplexity, we bethink ourselves of a powerful glass, capable of bringing distant things nigh and putting the obscure in a flood of light. We hold it to our eye. We bring it to bear on that uncertain cloudy terror, with fast beating hearts.

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Oh, dreadful sight! Fellow-traveler, our conjectures were all too true. It *is* a red, flaming Abyss. Those objects shooting continually into it *are* travel-worn men like ourselves, and on that overhanging blackness of cloud we can spell out in fiery characters, "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever."— We bring the powerful glass to bear again. It also is real — that fair City. Never have we seen such beauty; such soft, delicious brightness. Walls and towers of gems; gates of pearls; pavements of transparent gold; palaces of spotless alabaster; inhabitants beautiful as the day, wearing snowy vestures and kingly crowns, and some among them with the stamp of humanity (and what a humanity) in their beaming and transfigured faces. Love and rapture breathe in their every look and movement. And every shining gate and every rosy cloud say, And they shall go no more out forever. Ah, friend, those distant landscapes are no longer a conjecture. All is plain now. That vague, shadowy horizon has given up its secrets, and, beyond a doubt, the two goals toward which men are so helplessly driving are Heaven and Hell. Even while we gaze, the Abyss and the City, the terror and the joy, seem drawing nearer and nearer, showing plainer and plainer.

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I know not how you may feel, fellow-traveler in this involuntary journey; but I, for one, am anxious, not only to escape that fiery lake, but also to know that I shall escape it — am anxious, not only to reach the Celestial City, but also to know that I shall reach it. While feeling myself swept forward with tornado force, I want also, above all things, to feel that the end of this rushing career is sure to be the everlasting kingdom of God. What right have worldly things to the first place in a man's heart, or on his lips, when he is cleaving the air like an arrow toward the glories or the woes of eternity! It is pleasant to close the eyes in soft slumbers, pleasant to snatch perishable flowers and fruits as we sweep along, pleasant to look upward on stars and around on landscapes, pleasant to reason and imagine and talk about the many novel and curious things that go shooting by: but of what account ought these to be to a man who sees *two eternities* contending for him in the distance! That bottomless Gulf, that rejoicing Jerusalem — they are no air castles built by idle fancies; no baseless visions seen by sleeping men when the mind has cast off the yoke of reason, and destined to melt away with the dawn; no inventions of schemers anxious for a name,

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and careless of the world's repose. They are God's own facts. Only a few days' journey lies between me and them. Nothing earthly is of moment to me in the presence of such circumstances. My first care shall be to escape, if escape I may, destruction; and to know that I am escaping it — to gain, if gain I may, salvation within thy gates of pearl, O Zion; and to know that I am gaining it: so that, while every fibre is aching at the dizzy speed with which the future becomes the present and the present the past, I may still hear the rush without fear, and even count joyfully the mile-stones as they go glancing by. And whom does not such a purpose suit? At this moment, while you feel on your face the panting of the hurrying hours, and catch a new glimpse of the angry and sunny landscapes toward one or the other of which you are so helplessly making your way, should not your heart say, and say fervently, God grant that this race of mine may come to the happier ending, and take me through the gates into the jeweled City, instead of over the precipice into the red Gulf!

God has already granted the possibility of this. Though yonder pinnacles glitter gloriously enough to be the home of gods, they may be the home of

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men — may be *your* home. Do we not, peering through our telescope, see human forms among the city-throng — Moses and Elias, who came transfigured thence to the mount of transfiguration; Paul, to whom departing was being with Christ; that long procession of the men of faith, whom Paul celebrates as having desired a better country, that is a heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city; the apostles, for whom Jesus prayed that they might be with Him where He is and behold His glory; and, lest the meanest and unworthiest should despair, Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, with the thief who heard it said to him, "This day shall thou be with me in Paradise." Little children, hoary men, princes, statesmen, shepherds, publicans, fishermen, Jews, Gentiles, freemen, bondmen — so men called them here — all look upon us from over those crystal battlements. Not a class in the world but has some representatives in that capacious and charitable metropolis. These now glorified ones, looking out from under their kingly crowns, were once swept along through time and this world as helplessly as we. They bent eye on the horizon, they peered at it through revealing lenses, they hoped

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and feared at the great things they saw, just as we have been doing. And now they are safe, happy, blessed. Surely, then, there is a chance for us. The City is large — there is room. The citizens are loving — we shall be welcome. The method of entry which answered for publicans and sinners — why should it not answer for you and me?

But something more than a mere entry is possible. We can have an *abundant* entrance. One who had a clearer vision of yonder horizon than most, was once looking toward the City with all his might, when he saw two persons approaching it. First Christian passes the river. As he reaches the other side two angels meet him, and conduct him upward to the gate, where a shining company receive and joyfully escort him within. Next passes Christiana. "And, behold, all the banks beyond the river are full of horses and chariots sent down from above to accompany her. And glorious it is to see how the upper region is filled with horses and chariots, with trumpeters and pipers, with singers and players on stringed instruments as she goes up and enters at the beautiful gate." So saw Bunyan, and so we may see for ourselves. For now that I hold up the Bible

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to my eye, I find that it commands the approach to the City. I see persons entering. I see a difference in the manner of entering. To some the gate is opened just widely enough for their admittance: while to others it is flung back as if for the march of a conqueror. Some, a few Shining Ones come forth to welcome: others are flocked around by whole greeting armies of celestials. Some almost reach the gate before any escort appears: others find the glittering files of chariots and horsemen stretching away to the River, covering all its banks — nay, hovering quite across the dark waters and making them glow with their own mirrored beauty, like the very River of Life. For some a few silver trumpets sound: for others the whole welkin seems ringing with the joy of innumerable minstrels. Our glass shows us all this, and more. It has the wonderful property of showing us, not only the fact, but the reason of it — not only the discrimination made in the reception of different persons, but the cause of the discrimination. "If ye do these things ye shall never fall, for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly." The cause is a difference in their way of living in this world. Here lies the secret of the City almost emptying itself of its in-

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habitants and its music to do honor to some men. And it is a secret for our use. The same style of living that gives the abundant entrance to them will doubtless give it to us. We can enter; and, if we choose, we can enter like princes coming home from conquest — Heaven's choicest banners streaming over us, Heaven's choicest songs rung out, Heaven's brightest armies attending, Heaven's widest gate thrown widely open.

Since we have been conferring on this matter our steps have not been lingering. Just as fiercely as ever has our race toward eternity been kept up. The Gulf and the City are nearer than they were an hour ago. As we have sped flashing through moment after moment, never to be touched again, both the wonders of the horizon have been becoming more distinct. It will not take many days of such tornado journeying as ours to bring us to the one or the other. And then the appearance of great distance is often deceptive. This atmosphere through which we view things has been known to practice many great impositions on the sight. Persons have seemed to themselves leagues on leagues away from eternity — so their eyes seemed to tell them — while really it was not a stone's cast from them,

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and, one indivisible moment passed, they had reached it. Under these circumstances, would it not be well for you to set about, without any further delay, impressing the right direction on the unceasing rush of your steps, by the one way provided, so as to make sure an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

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XXI.

WHITHER BOUND?

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WHITHER BOUND?

A SHIP on the ocean is sometimes hailed with the inquiry, *Whither Bound?* Immediately the strong answer goes from the trumpet, To New York, To London, To Calcutta — as the case may be. The captain means that this is the port which he *wants* to reach, the port he *proposes* to reach, and, by implication, the port which his general mode and tack of sailing are, in his view, *suited* to reach.

I have thought that the question which one ship calls to another would be a most proper question for me to call to you. We have happened near each other on the open sea of life. Sailing, sailing, we both are, with might and main; every sail filled and the waters breaking in foam about our prows. Neither can stop nor slacken: but we may exchange over the waters, as we go steadily on, the friendly inquiry, *Whither Bound?* I will endeavor to take the question as well as to give it: but suffer me just now to call it out to

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you, so loudly and distinctly that it can be heard above the din of life's winds and waves and rattling cordage. WHITHER BOUND? Where do you want to go, where do you propose going, and where, in your view, will your present course naturally take you?

Two thirds of this question you can answer satisfactorily and without hesitation. You can tell what you want your port of destination to be, and you can also tell what you mean to have it be, some day. Your wish is to make at last a heavenly shore, and to float eternally in the sheltered haven of everlasting blessedness. Is it not so? Do you not even go so far as to have some sort of purpose, more or less clear, of finally making your way into Heaven? Perhaps this destination is already the one great object of your life. I may at least be sure of this, that you mean, at some indefinite time, to take advantage of some favorable breeze, and to allow yourself to be wafted duly into the celestial haven. How could you live without some such lurking intention? If you believe that there are only two ports possible to soul-ships (and I am not willing to allow that you who have so plain a Bible as ours are without such a belief), how can you, a rational being, rest a mo-

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ment without intending, sooner or later, to crowd on all canvas, if necessary, and bear away from eternal ruin to eternal salvation! You cannot. I know it by knowing that it is a human ship I am hailing.

Whither Bound? Two parts of this question you can answer promptly and satisfactorily. Perhaps you can answer the third part as well. To which of the two great ports which will at last gather into their capacious bosoms all that sails on life's main, is your present course taking you? Let us see what answer you can give to this. This is really the only solid part of the hail. The other parts merely ask whether you are a man: this part asks whether you are a wise man. Which way is the ship now heading? Whither will your present course carry you, if kept to? Oh, if with voice as decisive and stentorian as ever pealed out answer through a sea-trumpet, you can say to my *Whither Bound*, "I am bound for Heaven — my course is already laid for that port, my sails are trimmed for that, the wheel is being sternly held to that night and day" — if you can understandingly say this, you need envy no man living. You are a king. You are a mighty beatitude. I see you already riding at anchor, furled and bannered

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and salvoed, within the celestial Golden Horn. What is left to be desired for such a garlanded flag-ship as yours?

But it may be that you cannot give that happy answer. Perhaps it is perfectly clear to you that, instead of your prow pointing Heavenward, it is your stern that does so. To the *Whither Bound* that hails you, you are forced to answer (though almost under your breath), "I am bound to ruin — I know I am. Though I wish a heavenly destination, and in fact mean to seek it by and by; still I am well convinced that, as yet, my course is not such as to bring me to that point. I am sailing away from it. My back is on Heaven. I hope it will be otherwise some day; but I cannot but know that to-day my direction is perdition." There are many whose sense of their moral bearings is just so sharply defined and gloomy as this. If truth compels *you* to accept it as yours, you could not be worse off, unless the port of your approaching should become the port of your arriving. The next bad thing to complete ruin is to be on the way to it — beyond all reasonable doubt, on the way to it. You are to be pitied by everybody, most of all by yourself. For, methinks, I already see you riding at anchor, furled, bannered

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with black, hailed by dirging minute-guns, within the embrace of those twin fiery promontories whose names are endless Sin and Sorrow.

But it is not a strange case if, instead of being able to speak with confidence of your religious direction as being at present plainly away from Heaven or plainly toward it, you know not what to answer when the friendly inquiry *Whither Bound*, reaches you across the water. 'Really, you cannot tell where your present course, if continued, would bring you. Sometimes you think your lay of the wheel will enable you to make the port of Heaven ; but then again you have serious doubts. On the whole you do not know.' The ship, in a dangerous sea and under press of canvas, is, she knows not where — and is going, she knows not whither. Who ever heard of seaman on the Atlantic caring to sail long in this manner? Does he not consider that his "wet sheet and flowing sea" may in an hour finish his sailing forever? He must forthwith discover his whereabouts and direction. He sets to poring over his chart and compass. He hurries out his instruments for an observation. He hails the ship that chances to come near him, if perhaps he can get some friendly light as to his latitude and longitude and bearings

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Why will you not do as much — you who are out on the perilous sea of probation with a strong wind and rushing prow, and yet know not whether Heaven is before you or behind you, far or near? If you are willing to make an effort to solve this problem perhaps you may be helped by answering the following questions.

What port are you trying to reach? The question is not in respect to the destination you wish, or mean at last to seek. Beyond a doubt, you are not wanting at this point. But the question is, Toward which of the two great ports of eternity are your present leading cares and efforts intelligently put forth? Of course you are not intelligently trying to land in Death and Hell. But are you intelligently trying, with some good degree of earnestness and perseverance, to land in Life and Heaven? If you are, you may hope that you are on the way to Heaven. You are heading in the right direction, and in due season, if you keep to your tack, you may find yourself entering the blessed haven. But if you are doing nothing with reference to entering — if all your present pains are being spent on your worldly interests, and the religious are left to shift for themselves as best they may until some indef-

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inite convenient season arrives — then certainly you are ***not*** on the way to Heaven. Your course, faithfully kept to, will bring you into eternity at a far different point. Will the ship that, amid winds and currents from all points of the compass, never makes persevering effort with distinct reference to getting to London — will she ever get there? Are there any underwriters in the country who would insure a vessel to Calcutta under the condition that the master should be under no obligation to lay himself out to reach that port? There are a thousand ways to fail, and but one to succeed. All ways to Heaven but one are wrong. Hell lies all round the compass; you can reach it by going in almost any direction. You can let the wheel take care of itself, and still make sure of reaching that woeful harbor. But the man who would reach Heaven must sail on one general line; and, amid the darkness and changeful winds and currents of life, he will never find this, and keep to it, without some degree of earnest and persevering effort to do so.

What chart and compass do you employ? If you go by a chart that locates Heaven where it is not (and there are such charts in use in the world) — if you make a practice of consulting a needle

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that says south is north (and there are such needles), you will hardly reach Heaven. That port lies in a certain definite direction; and alas for the man who takes up the idea that it lies at the opposite point of the compass, and sails accordingly! Heaven will not shift its position to help his mistake. And there is nothing hard in this, because you have a perfect and self-demonstrating compass in your binnacle, a perfect and self-demonstrating chart in your cabin. The Bible is a guide for the voyaging soul. It maps down the port of Heaven just where God knows it really to be — it points out just the course one must take to reach it — it shows all the rocks, whirlpools, and other causes of danger; in a word, it is the completest manual of sailing directions that ever government prepared for its mariners. If, now, you are honestly studying and sailing by this, every day, you cannot do better, you need not do better. Go on as you are going. God speed you! for you are on the right track. Your prow is pushing toward the true mark, and all the progress you make is so much progress toward Heaven. But, if you are consciously not studying and sailing by this chart, if the Bible is of no particular account to you in the ordering of your daily

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course, then there is no such comfort for you. Let deceiving Satan tell you what he will, you surely are on the way to Hell. Sail on as usual and nothing can save you. Follow your prow, and before long you will find your voyage finished — and your happiness also.

Are you taking daily celestial observations? Could you be assured that a ship out on the ocean has not had a sextant turned on sun, moon, or star for many days, you would be sure she must be somewhat out of her course. There is not one chance in a thousand that, what with veering winds and currents and an unsteady rudder, she has not come to head in a wrong direction. Therefore it is a law of sea-life that every day the skipper must look up to the far sky, and with his instrument commune with the shining orbs there, that he may know his place and bearing. Are you doing something akin to this? Are you daily and carefully looking up for guidance to the far sky? Do you know by personal experience what systematic communion with the heavens is? In plainest English, do you know how to *pray* — not forms and words merely, but devout thoughts, wishes, and purposes (imperfect indeed and spotted with many sins, but still honest and hearty),

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going up perseveringly to God for light and power to order life wisely and religiously and unto everlasting life? If you know nothing of this, can any one dare to tell you that you are sailing toward Heaven? My friend, you are standing the other way — all your wishes to the contrary notwithstanding. It is not possible that you can have kept your direction right, if you once had it so, amid the subtle currents, winds, and fluctuations of temptation, without celestial observations. But let us hope that you will not long be without them, but that you will be seen perseveringly looking upward for Divine keeping and direction; so that, at last, the dangerous navigation over, you may disembark triumphantly into the everlasting kingdom. That would be one of the best of signs. It would show that, if not already heading toward Heaven, the ship will soon be doing so. She is gradually changing her bearings, she is rounding to; and he who sees those skyey communings going carefully forward a little longer, will see at last the brave vessel settling to her true course and standing across the waters dead in the eye of the sun-rising.

Have you made any great change in your course, within your recollection? Send your thought

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backward, and see if you can find a time when you were moving in a direction directly the opposite of the present. Ask whether there has ever been a complete reversal of your moral feelings and plans of life. The first course of all men is away from Heaven. If you are now sailing toward it, it is because the ship has been put about at some time. Do you remember any time when your heart misgave you, and the sails for a while hung in flapping uncertainty against the masts as you stopped headway; and at last you swung round, round, point after point of azimuth, full sixteen of them, and then sped on in a course which has never substantially altered up to the present? If you know no such time, but are going in the same direction you have been going in from the first — if your moral views, feelings, and plans of life are the same they always have been, — do not imagine that your face is toward Heaven. Your distance from that port is increasing daily. But as soon as a change, a great change, a change amounting to a reversal of your natural feelings and plans and doings in moral and religious things, takes place, then a more cheerful view can be taken of your case. You have been regenerated. You have new affections and a new object

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of life. Old things have passed away: behold all things have become new. Your great loves and fears and hopes bear on different objects. Gained is that new birth without which no man can see the kingdom of God. And to the question, *Whither bound?* which your fellow-voyager puts to you, you can give the fullest sort of answer, — and the most satisfactory — "I am bound to Heaven; it is the port I *want* to reach; it is the one I *propose* reaching; and, above all, it is the one toward which my prow and movement are *this moment* directed."

What freightage do you carry? Could you, just out of the harbor of New York, board a number of ships and inspect their cargoes, you would be able, in many cases, to form a just idea of their destinations without asking any questions or having any regard to the direction of the sailing. One ship you find loaded with wheat. "Bound for England," you say. Another you find loaded with ice. "Bound to the tropics," you say. Still another you find loaded with arms. You say, "Bound for South America." And you can tell whither a voyaging soul is bound by inspecting its true bill of lading. What principles, plans, and feelings are stored away within it? Is

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it freighted with sound doctrines, and Christian feelings, and purposes to match; love to God and man, great leading plans of life all shaped by benevolence and conscience? What further light is needed? The ship is bound to Heaven, of course. That is the port of eternity where such things are in great demand — in fact, reckoned of unspeakable value — and it is the only port where they are in any demand at all. But suppose you find the hold freighted with unbelief, and unscriptural views of God and sin and man's natural relation to God; with selfishness, and pride, and revenge, and supreme love of the world, and general aversion to the government of God; suppose you find the ship heavy with such articles as these. Do you need to ask the master toward what port he is sailing? I do not. He is sailing toward Hell, of course. That is the natural destination of all such articles as he carries. They are not used nor allowed anywhere else in the eternal world. One can unlade any amount of these bitter wares on the fiery wharves of Penalty and Destruction; but not one shred of them can be disembarked into the golden streets of Eternal Blessedness. What freightage

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do you carry? Look honestly and carefully, and then infer whither you are bound.

Lastly, as you advance on your present course, how vary the aspects and circumstances of your condition? As Columbus made his way along toward the New World he noticed that the air gradually assumed a different tone, the water a different color. Flocks of strange birds became more and more numerous, new weeds floated in increasing abundance around; then was picked up a reed newly cut, a thorn with red fruit upon it, a staff curiously wrought and adorned; at last, a light was seen glancing from place to place. The signs of the New World thickened upon him as he sailed on, as the signs of the Old World had thinned and disappeared as he sailed away from it. So, if you are sailing toward Heaven, you can see the natural signs of that sunset land gradually increasing about your path. The air is growing sweeter and purer, the waters brighter and clearer, and stray products of the luxuriant land before you float out to you more and more. That is to say, your moral nature finds it easier to breathe and flourish the further you go; the ways of God toward yourself and others seem more and more true and wise and good and de-

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serving of trust; your knowledge of divine things, and conscientiousness, and readiness at understanding God's Word and Ways increases; on the whole, perhaps, your serenity and hope and enjoyment, and conscious help of the Holy Spirit, are ever gaining. If you have been some time on the way to Heaven some such improvement as this ought to be noticeable: such predictions of the haven you are approaching ought to float out to meet you, and sensibly thicken on you as you advance. Do they? Or does it seem to you that the longer you live the darker seems the Bible, the harder the Providence of God, the more stupid your conscience, the more scanty your allowance of hope and help? Then look out for the worst. You have a haven ahead, but it is not such as you will care to reach, or any true friend of yours care to have you reach. Sail on, and you will reach the end of your sailing and of your happiness at the same time. A *Whither bound* to you will have to bring back the most formidable answer that seaman ever sent across the water. You must reverse the wheel. You must put *completely about*, or shortly you will find yourself disembarking into a desolate and undone eternity.

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XXII.

A PRESSING CALL.

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XXII.

A PRESSING CALL.

WHATSOEVER *thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.* Beyond a doubt, among the many things we find to do is the work we are accustomed to call religion.

Consider a moment. Religion consists in that influential faith in Christ which holds an obedient and holy life wrapped up in it, as a seed holds the great tree which will, in time, grow out of it. It implies reconciliation with God, trust in Christ, repentance, and a gradually rising structure of holy habits, within and without, on this foundation. Now, we do not naturally have any of these things. But we must have them all. Little comfort and usefulness, no safety and no Heaven, without them. And, if we ask how these necessaries are to be gained, Scripture points upward to God for one part of its answer, and downward to our own hands for the other part. We have to work out our religion. We are to seek for it; dig for it as for hid treasure; knock for it — we our-

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selves are to repent and believe; are to strive to enter at the strait gate; are to fight for goodness as in a battle and run for it as in a race. And this, although it is true that of ourselves we can do nothing, that salvation is not of works but of grace, and that all forms of goodness are fruits of the Spirit working in man to will and do of His good pleasure. Nor God, nor Bible, nor ministry, nor any agency whatever, helps a man to religion save in connection with his own efforts. The treasure can never be had as the result of a sleeping partnership between him and the means of grace. It is impossible to import religion into a passive being as goods are brought into a warehouse.

A second point. The religion which sinners have to do they should do with their *might*. They should put great energy into the work. This will appear if we weigh well, and put together, the following considerations.

Religion is goodness, usefulness, happiness, safety, and at last Heaven. The absence of it is depravity, hurtfulness, wretchedness, peril, and at last Hell. Tell me — what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul? Tell me — what shall a man give in exchange for

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his soul? This thing of incomputable grandeur and values is staked on the possession of religion. It will be beautified and blessed, or deformed and cursed, for two worlds, according as this religion is gained or neglected. We are in the habit of speaking of very many things as important, as highly important: but how pitifully small, how microscopic, is every other interest in presence of the religious! Let every man of weighing judgment; every man who on putting his soul in one scale of a balance finds that all created good besides, when placed in the opposite scale, cannot make it rise by the breadth of a hair, or even sensibly lessen its tremendous gravitation — let every such man echo my words when I say that it is impossible to overestimate the importance of religion.

Great blessings are apt to be hard of acquisition. The great blessing, religion, is not gotten by the lifting of a finger. Religious people know this from experience, that great teacher — also from revelation, that greater teacher still. What man ever repented and believed, changed the ground of his character, overcame a whole system of inveterate evil habits fending off from religion like so many lions and archers — all in the

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manner of water flowing down hill, or of smoke climbing a clear and frosty sky? Behold the strait gate that must be entered by striving! Behold the foretold cross which men must take up in order to be Jesus' disciples! All helps to the contrary notwithstanding — and they are not few nor small — the kingdom of heaven in every instance has to "suffer violence and be taken by force." He who eats the bread of life at all will eat it by the sweat of his brow. The men who from the common harvest field reap and gather into barns, do it with swaying and taxed arms that soon become sore and wearied: do not expect to reap piety and Heaven with anything less. The chasm between God and man has been bridged; but the bridge is a narrow footpath; and even as the brute hangs back and needs to be goaded and dragged along the sounding boards that span the abyss, so our perverse and willful natures hang back from crossing to God and religion, and need to be driven and dragged with laborious energy. Let the sinner consider how much moral force has already been put forth on him — in vain.

And let him also consider that the trouble between God and himself naturally increases every

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day. They are far asunder now — to-morrow they will be further apart. The heart will be a degree harder, and will give itself to sinful ways with a degree more of resolution. A day more of guilt will lie at the door, and a day more of the practice of sin will have made the habit worse. So the trouble between God and the soul moves ever toward the point where it will be beyond the reach of any peacemaker. Is it not harder to pull up a tree the longer it has been planted? And can you expect that the habit of disobedience to God will prove an exception to the general law? No doubt you feel it hard to-day to change the course you have been on from childhood. When you look into your present heart you find quite enough reluctance to immediate action in favor of religion. Should it not come home to you that the lapse of time is far from doing anything to improve your circumstances? Should you not painfully feel that the hill you have to climb is becoming steeper every moment?

We have only this one life in which to achieve religion. Our lives are indeed two; but of these two only the present can be used for this work. If we do not manage to get peace with God, and a new character, before we die we shall get it

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never. Eternity is long; many things can be done in it; but among these many things never expect to find that new birth without which no man can see the kingdom of God. A few persons, a mere handful out of the nations and generations that receive the Bible, dream that there is work and device of turning to God in the grave whither we go; but it is only a dream. The next life holds a fulcrum in aid of religion, but the lever which works on that fulcrum lies entirely within this world. No ghostly hand can stretch across the grave to it. No fleshly hand from this side can, with huge effort, cast it over into the spirit land in aid of some friend who neglected the opportunities of the present life. Had we hundreds of lives such as the Hindu supposes, or even two, the exhortation to do with our might what our hands find to do would come to us with much less force than it does now — with our single life into which must be crowded the whole difficult and most important work of achieving religion.

A single life and that a very short one! Our next life has length enough to content the greediest at living: but this — a grasshopper can clear it at a leap. What a speck by the side of angel lives, or the lives of the earlier patriarchs. It is a

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breath that whistles and is gone. It is a ray that smites the mirror and, or ever you are aware, has shot off to a distant world. I speak in this manner because it is the Biblical way of speaking. We cannot well get beyond such a statement as this, Our age is as nothing before Thee. Such a way of speaking is scarcely intelligible to a child: but as we grow older it has less and less of an air of solemn extravagance; and it is easy to see that ten thousand years hence we may look back on our lives in this world as we now look on so many atoms of dust. Not altogether because we shall then measure time by the clock of eternity, but because we shall then better take in the prodigious sweep of human nature in its aspirations, needs, capacities, and destinies. Let us get a glimpse of this now; and say that our days are a hand breadth in which the great work we have to do must be done with our might. The sun of our scant day is hasting over the arch. Soon, very soon, it will dip beneath the West. What thou doest, do quickly.

But we are far from having the whole of even this one short life in which to work out our religion. Our span from the cradle to the grave — "this narrow neck of land twixt two unbounded

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seas" — is largely subtracted from, as a field of religious labor, in many ways. First, infancy cuts off a part. A third of all the remainder has to be spent in sleep. Of our waking time by far the larger part, in the case of most men, must be spent in worldly cares and labors. A still further part is sacrificed in that languor and weariness of both body and mind which flow from these worldly efforts, and during which our power of religious feeling, thinking, and doing is very considerably lessened. And then, old age closes the scene with another infancy, another period of languor and weariness, in which but a fraction of our faculty as doers remains to us. So that, in point of fact, but a small part of even this one brief life of ours can be fully turned to account for that conversion-work which our hands find to do. Our small patrimony of opportunity is cut down on all sides by various encroachments until hardly a tenth of its original extent is left us. Depredator after depredator quietly pushes inward the fence-lines until at last they almost touch each other. Had we a hundred probationary lives, had we one such life as Methuselah's, had we even the whole of our scant three-score and ten years, there would be far less need than there now is for the call to do

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with our might what our hands find to do: for now it turns out that "the point of time, the moment's space, which sends us to yon heavenly place or shuts us up in hell," is cut down to a pitiful remnant that just twinkles and is gone. Yet it has voice enough to cry like a giant in our ears, "*Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*"

But this is not all. Even that slender remainder of life which is available for achieving religion after the many subtractions made from it by our circumstances in this world — even this pitiful remnant is very *uncertain.* It is so much quicksilver in our hands. The three-score and ten years are not sure to us — no, not a day, nor an hour, is sure. Is your sun at meridian, and are you expecting that it will be just as long in descending the arch as it has been in ascending? Why, sir, that sun of yours which has hitherto moved so equally over the sky, may at any moment break up its sober pace and shoot through the whole remaining quadrant in an hour. Is your sun just risen, and are you expecting that it will creep up and up never so long, and then creep down and down never so long, till at last it settles behind the west some fifty or eighty years hence? Be-

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ware! Count on nothing of the kind. It would be no miracle, but a very common event, should your orb, fresh in morning splendors, suddenly pass behind a cloudy screen and hie by some short by-path to its grave in the west; and all within the compass of a few minutes even. Are you strong and healthy, and do people speak of you as having a constitution of iron? No matter. Men as well constitutioned and vigorous as you are every day falling like grass before the mower. *Your* life is almost as precarious as that of yon weak and delicate person whom every east wind sets a trembling. Nor is this the only sort of uncertainty that calls loudly for your attention. Your working at religion cannot avail save with the co-working of another. Divine hands must grasp the lever side by side with yours. A Holy Ghost must toil at your sinews, and in them, as well as with them. But this great Helper cannot be counted on. To-day may see Him with us; and to-morrow may see Him a grieved being, Heaven's distance away, gone never to return. He will not pledge Himself to a single moment beyond the present. We have fair warning from Him not to be surprised if, neglecting our souls, we wake some morning to find our hearts turned

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to stone — to unalterable stone, because He, the great heart-softener, has taken last leave of us. Thus it happens that the small fraction of our lives we have for securing our salvation is hampered with a double uncertainty — the uncertainty that it will last, and the uncertainty that we can use it if it does. Were we sure of our fraction, and also sure of a Holy Spirit through the whole of it, then there would be a less need of the loud Scripture-call to us to do with our might the religion we find to do. As it is, not knowing what a day may bring forth, whether a departure of God or of life or of both; as it is, with our pitiful remnant tottering and slipping in the mire of these two great uncertainties, we are bound to cry to our droning souls, *Up, and be doing with all your might, at turning to God!*

The case is before you. It is proven and carried in the court of your own judgment in favor of swift and mighty effort at repenting and being reconciled unto God. No one can choose but acknowledge that the argument is of the clearest, and perfectly conclusive; and that, if you do not at once begin to work your faculties and the means of grace for securing religion and salvation with keen and remorseless activity, your conduct will

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be flagrantly unreasonable. What will you do? Will you continue to act as if you have a plenty of time and to spare — as if there is no manner of urgency in your religious affairs, and they can be indefinitely postponed; or worked at as leisurely as a fashionable education? Or, will you (considering that religion is a work of the last consequence and difficulty, and that you have but one short life in which to do it — indeed, if the truth must be told, but a mere remnant of one short life, and that a very uncertain remnant too, both as to length and availability), will you rouse yourself to mighty instant work, and do for eternal life with both hands and as if you have no time to lose? Be prevailed upon to do so. Do not allow yourself to be influenced in this matter by the common example. It is a pernicious example. It is unreasonable, and will be fatal. It is treating religion as if you are sure of life and of the Holy Spirit, as if life for repenting purposes is an integer instead of a pitiful fraction, as if life is Methuselean or you have a hundred lives instead of one. Far be such conduct from one who confesses to the grandeur of a soul, and who hears the Scripture bidding him do with his might what his hands find to do!

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There is yet some softness in your heart. As yet the Spirit has not forsaken you. Methinks I see Him offering you all needed aid in the effort to put forth the Great Decision. Will you try to do it? No Divine sovereignty, no foreordination, no strength of whatever evil circumstance, puts it out of your power to repent and believe. I beg that you will do what, under the circumstances, you can do. Not merely because God longs to receive His enemies as friends, nor because the heart of Christ yearns over you, nor because I have a duty to do and a reward to gain, nor because Christian relatives and friends would be broken-hearted should you be cut off in your sins — no, not merely for these, but for *your own sake.* Think how your controversy with God is daily strengthening. Think how daily your heart is hardening, and aversion to religion getting stronger. Think how God is getting more incensed as you are getting more guilty. The growing difficulty of repenting — let that alarm you. The uncertain tenure by which you hold the striving Spirit and the short life — let that alarm you. I pray you by your hazard of perpetual warfare with God, by your hazard of losing the world of glory and gaining the world of woe, by the bright-

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ness of all you value, and the blackness of all that you fear — be reconciled to God.

"As though God did beseech you by us." Look on these words of mine as being a Divine beseeching. Can you go forward in the face of an entreating God? If you do, what guilt is yours! I cannot measure it; I cannot express it; but you can feel it. Not now. After the fevered dream of life is over, and you come to reap the whirlwind after having sown to the wind, then you will know the greatness of your guilt by the greatness of your punishment. May you be spared that terrible lesson. Learn anything else, but learn not what it costs to refuse a beseeching God. Flee far from the faintest glimpse of that bitter knowledge. Know rather the happiness and the Heaven of yielding to that Divine entreaty. Calling mightily on the Savior for help — *at once* give yourself completely away to His service. Trust not to-morrow. O To-morrow, To-morrow, how red thou art with the life of souls!

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XXIII.

WHAT WILL HE DO?

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XXIII.

WHAT WILL HE DO?

YONDER is a human being. You may call him Caucasian, African, Malay — any of the five races. You may call him English, Turk, Chinese — any of the hundred nations. You may call him rich or poor, wise or ignorant, noble or serf — any of the thousand classes into which society is divided. You may call him Peter, James, John; may call him Pilate, Caiaphas, Judas — any of the millions of individual men. Suit yourself. It is enough if he is a sinful and condemned child of Adam to whom has come the glorious Gospel.

Behold the man! Here is one for whom Christ died. Here is one to whom belongs the *possibility of salvation.* O thought most stupendous! The necessary foundation for mercy has been laid, all the preliminaries have been perfected, and now this sinful, condemned, lost man can be saved — saved from sin, saved from hell, saved into Heaven. And this, despite Satan, despite the love

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and practice of sinning, despite evil examples most profuse, despite sentences of condemnation already passed and heaped up about him in terrific hugeness quite to the arch of heaven. The fact is soon stated. Salvation is a word that swiftly passes the lips and is gone. But there is a meaning here that is oceanic: and who is so wild as to think that there will ever appear a soul able to drop its fathom-line quite through such ideas as those of endless guilt and sorrow escaped, and endless holiness and happiness won?

And this magnificent possibility of salvation is *in the man's own hands.* In a sense, it may be in the hands of Christian friends who can labor with him and pray for him; in the hands of the Gospel minister who can preach faithfully to him the convincing Word; above all, in the hands of God who sends the regenerating and sanctifying Holy Ghost: but also, in a true and most commanding sense, it is in the hands of the man himself. God has seen fit to put him in charge of this tremendous deposit. Its fate is left at his discretion. No power above or below is allowed to overrule his own will in its disposal. Influences of various kinds from without may bear on his will to determine its action; but, at the last, everything is

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made to hinge on his own free choice. He may let that possibility of salvation slip away from him. He may, weakly and cowardly, allow one enemy or another to plunder him of it. He may, deliberately or in a pet, throw it away from him as men hurl stones out of a sling. And he may, if he pleases, improve that glorious opportunity of salvation to the utmost — may turn the possible salvation into an actual one, and the chance of an everlasting Heaven into the certainty of it. Some of his opportunities may be, as it were, immovably glued to his hands — no negligence and no violence can part the two — but the opportunity of salvation is by no means of this sort. So to speak, it lies loose on his palm. Just like the diamond of nine hundred carats which the Brazilian slave has picked up, but has not yet recognized. He does not know what a treasure he has. He thinks it hardly more than a common stone. He may hold it so carelessly and sleepily that it will drop unawares between his parted fingers. He may fling it away from him as a worthless pebble. Or, a sudden light coming to him, he may clasp his fingers tightly about it, until, arrived in the presence of his master, he receives in exchange for it perpetual freedom. For the time the great

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gem is his to keep or to lose — to lose in this way or in that, according to his folly or his fancy. Just so with the possessor of that mightier jewel, the possibility of salvation. He can make the most of it or nothing of it, can keep it or lose it, can lose it in any one of many ways — just as he pleases; according to his wisdom, his folly, or his fancy.

What will he do with it? A celebrated writer has written a book with this title: but the question is asked solely in view of that class of possibilities with which the novelist is accustomed to deal. I ask it in view of that far grander sort of possibility — the possibility of eternal salvation — which yonder man has in his own hands, to keep or to lose, according to his own sovereign choice. Will he at last make anything out of it — make an actual salvation out of it? Or, will he throw it away — if you please, allow it to slip away at unawares out of his relaxed and sleepy hand?

What will he do with it? There is no doubt what he *ought* to do with it. He ought to improve it — ought to make an actual salvation out of it. Very many statements need to be looked at, at least twice, before their justice is perfectly apparent: and some never come out of their foggy

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doubtfulness, though the lookings toward them be indefinitely repeated. Not such the present statement. The first glance floods it with the light of an axiom. Any doubt what he ought to do with his glorious opportunity of salvation — any doubt whether, the matter being in his own hands, he ought to make sure of a permanent deliverance from all sins and miseries in the next life by a voluntary abandonment of sin in this — any doubt whether he should do a holiest thing by holiest means when both are possible — any doubt at clear midday whether the great sun is shining and the landscape swimming in his dazzling pomp of beams! Whatever other things are dark this is not. Yonder man, with the wonderful opportunity of salvation in his hands to be treated just as he pleases, should not throw the gem from him as though some refuse thing; nor should he allow it to be filched or fought away from him by his enemies in some moments of negligence or cowardice; nor should he, under pressure of any worldly occupation or weariness or indolence, suffer his fingers to relax and straighten and part and finally, at some unknown moment, let the heavenly jewel slip between them and disappear forever: but he should clutch it, and hold it with strained and in-

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exorable hands, while, with hasteful diligence, he shapes the possibility of salvation into the glorious certainty of it.

What will he do with it? There is no doubt as to what he had *better* do with it — as little as there is as to what he ought to do with it. He had better improve that opportunity of salvation: he had better do it forthwith, at whatever expense of labor and sacrifice. This is another plain matter that cannot be challenged. It is often hard to tell where a man's interest lies: and many is the case where he might vainly puzzle days and weeks over such a question. But, when it is asked whether yonder man who holds in his hands the possibility of salvation, would not find it for his interest to make all dispatch in converting the chance of salvation into the assurance of it, we have no need to ponder and puzzle as if over some knotty problem of the mathematics. The answer shines in at our eyes like a tropical noon-day as soon as we look at the question. *He had better do it*, we say to ourselves with an instantaneous and irresistible flash of conviction; and we know that should we live as long as the patriarchs we could never manage to take a different view of the case. Solomon calls

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the man a fool who neglects religion. God, in the parable of the rich man who gave himself up to his temporal schemes in neglect of his soul, says to him, Thou fool! And observation, enlightened by Scripture, feels permitted to vary somewhat a certain question proposed by Jesus, and ask, What shall it profit a man if he lose the world and lose his soul too: and what can pay a man for the loss of both this world and the next? — for such, no doubt, is the double loss a man has to submit to who fails to improve his opportunity of salvation. There are some small conveniences in allowing that opportunity to slip away unimproved — some labor and penitent bitterness are spared, and some sacrifices of pleasant indulgences avoided — but it is hardly worth while for Esau to part with his birthright for a mess of pottage, for Eve to part with Paradise for the sweetness of a fruit, for fugitive Louis XVI. to barter away his kingdom and life for a few minutes' walk in the sunshine outside of his hotly-pursued carriage; and it is hardly worth while for yonder man, who has the interests of his soul for an eternity in his own keeping, to let them all go into perdition for the sake of such mere pittances of gratification as sin has to offer.

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What will he do with it? There is no doubt what he ought to do with it, no doubt what he had better do with it, and as little doubt what he will, some day, *wish* he had done with it. Beyond question, he will see the time when he will wish with all his soul, permanently wish, that he had improved his opportunity of salvation from the very first of his having it. Should he finally throw it away, or lose it in any way, it is absolutely certain that he will come to bitterly regret his folly, and that his heart will keep aching over it for evermore. Conceive him dying — how he wishes he had used his opportunity! Conceive him at the tremendous judgment-seat — oh, how he wishes he had used his opportunity! Conceive him within the closed and sealed gates of his eternal doom — oh, how, beyond description, he wishes he had used his opportunity! At such times, and probably at others less formidable, reason, and conscience, and experience and fear will rouse themselves to testify what he should have done, and what he had better have done, till his heart becomes speared with regret that he did not long ago convert the possible salvation into an actual one. When we see the child at his school, and the young man at his college, throwing away

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his chance for a splendid education, we take it on ourselves confidently to predict that he will see a day when he will regret very keenly the truancy and the pleasures and the indolence which are now cheating him out of the honor and usefulness of a life-time: and shall we hesitate to say that the man who allows his prospects for eternity to go to ruin, and sacrifices to his indolence or his sin the glory and happiness of Heaven, will, sooner or later, reach a time when he will bitterly rue his misconduct, and thenceforward rue it permanently? For a little, it may be, Esau cared little that his birthright had slipped away so lightly between his fingers: but at last came a day of broad waking up to the full meaning of the calamity he had incurred, and then a barbed arrow went in at his heart and remained there as long as he lived. For a short time, a very short one probably, our first parents may have made little account of what dropped irrevocably out of their hands when they opened them to pluck the forbidden fruit: but, on the day when they were chased out of Paradise by sworded angels, they waked up to a wormwood retrospect that embittered all the rest of their lives. And, for a brief space, yonder man who

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has in his hands the opportunity of salvation, to do with it just as he pleases, should he allow that opportunity to run to waste while he is trying to lay hands on earth's trifles, may journey forward very easily and composedly through the years: but he will finally reach a point where the light will fall strongly on his vacant hands, and then his startled thoughts will rush back to see how, all along that highway, the precious jewels filtered through his careless fingers until none were left, and then his mourning will begin, never to end.

What will he do with it? No doubt what he ought to do with it, no doubt what he had better do with it, no doubt what he will some day wish he had done with it, but very considerable doubt what he will *actually* do with it. Not to God, who sees all ends from their beginnings. He knows precisely how the man will deal with his treasure. But to me it is a matter of very considerable doubt. I hope he will improve it — it would be so dreadful a thing for him to miss of salvation. Possibly he will — men appearing not more favorably than he, have done so, are doing so to-day. Still there is no certain telling. Men appearing as well as he, have, in very many instances, thrown away their opportunity of sal-

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vation, are doing so on every hand. True, it is an opportunity of inconceivable preciousness and magnificence: true, the motives to neglect it are of the paltriest: one looking at these alone might well think the neglect impossible. But facts are stubborn things. Do you not notice how people every day throw away great interests for mere nothings! Look toward almost any point of the compass, and you will see health, fortune, friends, reputation, carelessly projected into the air, like so many worthless stones, in order that the hands that held them may be free to catch hold of some pinch-beck bauble. Nay, you will see salvations themselves go spinning through the air from hands hurrying to grasp some hollow trifle, some flimsy tinsel, of this deceitful world. Is yonder man any wiser and better than many of these who do so unwisely and badly? Not a whit: and so I have doubts and fears as to what he will do. I am afraid he will do as so many others have done, and are doing. I have seen too much of the power of old associations; too much of the deep ruts which ancient habits wear in the character; too much of the craft of Satan, and the deceitfulness of sin, and the ease with which an informal and vague pro-

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crastination noiselessly fritters away year after year of a narrow probation; too much of urgent influences vainly employed by God to persuade such men to improve their winged opportunity of salvation — not to have most serious apprehensions, not to say expectations, that yonder man will at last take his place by the side of countless others in saying, The harvest is past, and the summer ended, and I am not saved.

Doubtful whether he will be saved! Doubtful what, in the terrible sovereignty of his free moral agency, he will do with it — with that magnificent chance of a permanent escape from sin and misery and perdition into Heaven! What a doubt is this! Tremble, ye friends of his — ye parents, children, brothers, sisters — tremble, as ye think of this tremendous uncertainty; as ye think of what the Christian salvation means; as ye think of what eternity and hell and Heaven mean; as ye see how loosely, to say the least, he tends to hold in his hands that inestimable jewel of a possible salvation; as ye see the relaxed, straightening, parting fingers of him who goes carelessly stumbling forward through the years with wandering eye. God forbid that peerless treasure should be lost! Is there nothing you

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can do to prevent it? True, the matter at the last is altogether in his hands; and should, at last, his eye become steady and wary, and his fingers tighten like a vice about the nine hundred carat gem he carries, until he lays it down in God's treasury above in exchange for the still nobler gem of eternal life itself, it will be because the fiat to do so has gone out from the throne of his own sovereign will. Still, you may be able to reach that sovereign will with shaping influences. See if you cannot. God is trying what He can do — do you try what you can do. Is there not such a thing as prayer, which before now has been potent in such cases? Have you not some faculty of truth-telling, of remonstrance, of entreaty, of persuasion? Oh, pray that the poor man may not at last be found to have thrown away his Chance — or to have lost it in milder ways. Oh, bring your personal influence to bear directly upon him, in every possible way and at every possible angle, to have him make the most of this his *Main* Chance. Perhaps you will reach him. Perhaps you will be able to create a happy answer to the question, *What will he do with it?* will be able to answer joyfully still another ques-

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tion, *What* HAS *he done with it?* by saying, He has improved it, he has made the most of it, he has converted the possible salvation which God put into his hands into an actual one.

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XXIV.

OBSTACLES.

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XXIV.

OBSTACLES.

WHY do not men repent as soon as summoned? If we look to the very bottom of the matter we shall find that the obstacles are underlaid by, and begin in, three things, viz., constitutional depravity, sinful habit, and certain evil influences from without headed by Satan. Without, is a living hostile power, a fallen archangel, doing all he can to oppose the repentance — engineering against it men and things, as well as his own personal force, with bitter vigilance and vigor. Within, the soul itself is fallen; has natural tendencies to sin; by hereditary fault is disproportioned, unbalanced, disordered, indisposed to a religious life. And then, on this native depravity has grown up by degrees a system of sinful habits — a certain facility and momentum in impenitent ways of living, arising from practice, which are themselves a distinct power against the Gospel.

Out of these roots grow certain secondary obstacles.

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And, first, there is *unbelief* — a principle which by itself defeats many a call to repentance. "Renounce your sins; undertake Christ's whole service; take refuge in His blood for all the evil past," says the urging Gospel. The sinner hears and says to himself, "Perhaps the Gospel is not true; perhaps even a God is a mere superstition; at least, perhaps there is no fearful penalty for not repenting." It seems to him that there is at least a possibility that the current views on these points are mistaken; and he allows that supposed possibility to quench his fears, and quench the Holy Spirit. On the strength of that slender *perhaps* he takes out a new lease of impenitent living. In that cockle-shell of a boat he puts forth again into the mid-sea of ungodliness. And this, often, against great remonstrances and demonstrations of the truth as it is in Jesus; and although it is proved to him that, if his assumed possibility were genuine, it would still be the part of wisdom not to treat it as if a certainty, or even as if a probability. So strongly do Satan, and depravity of nature, and sinful habits, act through the channel of unbelief.

Another obstacle to repentance is *inconsideration*. Some who believe do not reflect. They

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have a vague, general conviction that the facts are as evangelical Christendom represents them, but they give these facts no particular attention. That there is a God, that the Scriptures are His inspired message, that to repent and believe practically are essential to salvation, they do not question: only no sufficient thought is given to these ideas. They are suffered to lie half covered up in obscure corners of the mind for months and years together. If they creep abroad, they are straightway sent back to their obscurities. If they clamor, they are silenced. So many other things are to be thought of. The world's affairs and cares keep one so busy. Or, these men love their ease too well to bend their minds to such disquieting themes. They avoid books that treat of them. They avoid men that speak of them. In some cases they even avoid the sanctuary, and other means of grace, lest they should be compelled to think. Such views of religious facts as from time to time spontaneously flit through their minds do not deserve the name of thought. And thus it happens that they do not repent. Were they to think on their condition and the leading features of the Gospel with any tolerable measure of faithfulness, many of them would anxiously flee from

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the wrath to come. If they die in their sins and one asks, Why is it, the whole story is told in a single word — Inconsideration.

Another obstacle — *insensibility*. See yonder men! They go wherever sermons are to be heard, they courteously accept whatever exhortations are addressed to them, they keep up quite a considerable acquaintance with orthodox religious literature and defend it. And it is well. They are wanting in one obstacle to salvation that destroys many. But another obstacle still remains. They are without feeling. Somehow, their familiarity with the truth does not seem to get hold of the sensibilities. They are not afraid when viewing God's fearful things, nor attracted when viewing His attractive things. They sometimes wonder at their own indifference. It seems almost beyond nature, and beyond the reach of responsible control. And it *is* wonderful — a wonderful obstacle to repentance. Who repents till he is fairly roused? If such persons die in their sins and some one asks, Why is it, there is one word that tells the whole story — viz., Insensibility.

But there is a worse obstacle to repentance than want of feeling — it is feeling *against* religion. The truth is heard; Christ's calls to a new char-

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acter and life come before the soul; and now it is not as in the cases just considered, where all is met with a hard and sleepy indifference. There is strong feeling. But it is a feeling of opposition. The soul is angry at the truth. Christ is repulsive to its tastes. It feels bitterly toward His doctrines, toward His precepts, and toward His allotments. Not wormwood is so bitter to some of these awakened, exasperated people. They can have no patience with any who speak to them on the hateful topic. They will go greatly out of their way to escape the faithfulness of a Christian friend. The conscious repugnance is against religion in general. In some instances, however, it is only against particular branches of Christ's service; particular duties or doctrines; perhaps a single duty. Were it not for some single thing which the Gospel requires and which is very offensive to him, many a man would see nothing in the way of his becoming a Christian to-day. But he is very unwilling to forgive his enemy, or very unwilling to baptize his property in the name of Christ, or very unwilling to take publicly the garb and banner of a disciple, and it is this that blocks up to him the gates of the kingdom of God. His feelings are not consciously enlisted against the

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general service of Christ: and yet his state is such as barricades strongly against conversion. One cannot take even a single pet sin with him through the strait gate. And, rather than give that up, full many a man has stood out, all his life through, against the strongest means of grace, against conscience and the Holy Ghost. If want of feeling is an obstacle to repentance, there is a still greater obstacle in that feeling of opposition which heats some minds when the claims of the Gospel are pressed upon them.

These fundamental obstacles, viz., unbelief, inconsideration, insensibility, aversion, are often supported by subordinate ones like the following.

First, *secular prosperity*. As God looks at the matter, the temporal blessings of Providence ought to lead their possessor to repentance. Is he healthy? Does he scarcely ever have a pain; or smallest check to the swift, strong, full tide of his robust vigor? Do his friends multiply? Does his business prosper and his home brighten? He ought in gratitude to turn his heart to God. To continue to alienate affections and life from his Benefactor is very unseemly and criminal. And yet, that very prosperity, instead of proving a help, often proves a hindrance to repentance. His

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lusty health encourages delay. His worldly thrift makes larger his self-sufficiency, and pride, and covetousness. The comforts of this world indispose him to seek a portion in another. So it often is — the blessing proves the bane, and we sadly remember the passage, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! You, perhaps, have known instances in which this obstacle has fought against conversion like an armed host. It has brought vast reinforcement to the unbelief, or the inconsideration, or the insensibility, or the aversion, which men must conquer before they enter the kingdom of God.

Second, *theological speculation.* By this I mean religious inquiries and discussions which, however useful and important to some, are to an impenitent person mere matters of curiosity. Election, and free-will, and the origin of sin, and the ultimate essence of virtue — such hard topics have their use, and some Christians may profitably task their faculties upon them. But the impenitent sinner, who, when called on to repent, falls to perplexing himself with such matters, will find that, instead of helping him to Christ, they are grievously hindering him. It is as if one

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should betake himself to Algebra before learning the alphabet. The mathematics are good, but they are not the way to one's letters. Those high, cloud-lands of religion are good in their place, but the way to repentance does not lie through them. Dealt with out of season they lead away from repentance. They put out of sight the business on hand. They make the mind unpractical. They scatter the sensibilities. Unless an inquiring sinner can be led to take things in their proper order; to repent first, and search into the deep things of God afterward — he never will repent at all. His perplexing theorizing will kill his convictions. It will drag him down to a worse insensibility, or unbelief, or inconsideration, or hostility. So far from it being necessary that he should probe to the core the metaphysics of religion in order to repent, it is necessary for that purpose that he let them alone.

Third, *example.* Pray tell me why that man failed to come to Christ. Yes, I will tell you; and he will unconsciously tell you himself, if you will open the way for him to speak on the faults of Christians. Instead of thinking of his own sins, he became critical upon his neighbors; gladly spied out their faults, real or supposed; pleased

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himself that he was nearly or quite as good as they, professors though they were; charged their faults, and even the hollow slanders on them, to religion itself, and cheerfully concluded that he could get along about as well without religion as with. Thus it came to pass that the revival did not touch him. Thus he stumbled over that common stumbling-stone, the bad example, real or supposed, of professing Christians. Perhaps he was aided to do it in part by another example. He saw that most men of all classes neglected religion. He saw that some of these were men of standing, and knowledge, and outward good behavior. "So many cannot be wrong, and miss a happy end," thought he. "One cannot fare very poorly if he fares with such men," thought he. So he was beguiled. And so, heeding not the Scripture, "Go not with the multitude to do evil," and "There is no wisdom nor understanding against the Lord," he settled into a feeling of security, and the world and sin took back all their old empire over him. His unbelief took on new strength. His inconsideration became more profound. His insensibility hardened itself still more. His aversion plumed itself and rose to new range and courage.

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Fourth, *shame* — false shame it is sometimes called, because based on false views of things. It is hard for a Christian of many years' standing to understand how any person, at all acquainted with the place which the Christian Religion holds in the world, and seeing how largely the weight and character of almost every enlightened community are enlisted on its side, can shrink from the idea of becoming known to his companions as a Christian, from very shame. Yet we know that such an extravagance often occurs. Satan has his profane wit. The thoughtless and the wicked can trifle and jeer over the most sacred and solemn subjects. They do not spare the companion who forsakes their circle — though it be to return to his God and Savior, renounce his sins, and save his soul. Not seldom this is a very formidable fact to one, especially a young person, who is agitating the question whether he shall plant himself on the side of Christ. He thinks of what his companions will say. He imagines their looks and witticisms when they hear of it. And the idea terrifies him. Under its influence he puts aside his convictions, and returns to his sins. Poor young man! fearing your fellow more than your Creator, ashamed of the glorious Christ,

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ashamed to put yourself on the side of God and angels and prophets and apostles and the best of every age and name! What a ground to miss salvation upon!

Fifth, *self-will.* It sometimes happens that men profess a willingness, and even desire, to become Christians, and wonder why they make no progress: while all the time their wills are obstinately set that they will not be helped toward conversion by such and such means, and in such and such ways. Their minds are made up that they will not allow themselves to be helped in at the Strait Gate by certain persons. They will not come in by the way of asking Christians to pray for them. They will not of themselves go to seek counsel and light from any one; will not rise and carry anywhere the ancient inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" — the minister, and the church, and the truth must come to them. And yet they claim that they are sincere seekers, and even perhaps that they are willing to do *anything* to compass so great a prize as salvation. No wonder that in such a course they do not find Christ. Their self-will is an effectual obstacle. The person whose heart is thoroughly engaged in seeking salvation will welcome any means of

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help that has been found useful in the experience of the church. And the person who has, in effect, adopted the principle that he will go to Heaven in his own way or not go at all, *will not go.* That mountain is too high and steep to be climbed.

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XXV.

EXCUSES.

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XXV.

EXCUSES.

IT is by no means uncommon for men to try to justify their conduct by considerations quite insufficient for the purpose. The best men do it. It is done by the most sensible.

But sensible men, I think, do not often try to justify themselves in worldly matters by considerations which *make directly against them.* The shrewd defendant throws the whole burden of proof on the plaintiff. He is careful not to allow himself to be overwhelmed by arms of his own furnishing. But it is far otherwise the moment he is summoned before the tribunal of religion to show why he remains impenitent. Then his usual shrewdness seems to forsake him. Scarcely a reason he offers but makes against himself. Ask him how he explains his attitude toward God and religion. Beg him to tell you why he does not give immediate attention to the concerns of his soul. And when his excuses are all in, and the best as well as the worst are fairly be-

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fore you, it will be found that they bear no trace of that just thought which in other matters he is wont to show. They are not only not enough to justify him, but they are even enough to *condemn* him. His excuses are to him what Baalam was to Balak — certain far-fetched friends doing in the critical moment just the opposite of what was desired of them; blessing what they were desired to curse, and cursing what they were desired to bless.

In general, it is not the way of the world to undertake a formal vindication of their course in neglecting religion. Not a few will frankly confess that it cannot be justified. And yet, if we come to press them on the subject of personal religion, we shall rarely fail to hear them saying something which is evidently doing in their minds the work, if not bearing the name, of an excuse for continuing a while longer in their sins. "Certain men have a name to live and are dead," or "business is so pressing," or "God is very merciful," or "the Scriptures are very obscure," or "the soul is not able to do anything for its own salvation," or "worldly acquaintances will speak or think the ridicule," or, more boldly, "Christianity is an unpalatable thing" — excuses

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which, so far from answering the purpose for which they are brought, are so many sentences of condemnation on those who bring them.

It is, my friend, as you say. No one can be more awake than myself to the exceedingly unworthy conduct of many professed disciples of Christ. All of them are very imperfect. Some show such dispositions and do such deeds as can only belong to the wicked. I freely and sadly admit it all. And, long before you had begun to observe, or I to lament, such facts, the Bible was out with its free telling of "wolves in sheep's clothing," of churches so distasteful that God was almost ready to "spew them out of His mouth," of men calling Christ *Lord*, whom He never knew. No, it is no discovery of yours that there are persons within the Christian church who are no better than they should be. I do not wonder that you have noticed a fact which has long been published to the four winds. What I do wonder at is that you speak of it as a sort of reason for neglecting a while the concerns of your soul. Certainly God can say to you when using such an argument, Out of your own mouth will I judge you.

Remember the war of the Revolution. The

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cause was good, but its faithful defenders were few and weak. It had hollow-hearted friends. In its poorly provided camp were many whose presence was of very doubtful advantage — some whose presence was plain disadvantage. If any American had been led by these circumstances to stand aloof from the cause of his bleeding country, might she not have cried to him, The fewer faithful soldiers I have, the more need I have of your faithful service. Was he not more bound to draw his sword promptly and vigorously in her defense, than he would have been had she been watched over and fought for by numerous veteran armies, all true as steel to her interests? And hence I may say to you that the fewer faithful friends the cause of true religion has, the more need of your espousing it. Every new instance of treachery to her interests is a new call on whatever is just and honorable within you to go to her aid. The smaller the number of good examples in the community the more important is it to have yours. The fewer lamps there are to enlighten the darkness of the world, the more need of having yours well trimmed and brightly lighted. When, therefore, I urge you to repent, and you answer by pointing at the hardness and

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selfishness, the bitterness and pride, of some man who has happened to find his way into the Christian church, may I not at once claim the sad fact as an argument for religion, and beg you with new urgency to espouse heartily that noble cause which is so much in want of faithful friends?

But you are "*very busy.*" From morning till night your thoughts and efforts are in your calling; and when the evenings and sabbaths come your wearied powers must rest. Your cares are many for your family and the public, as well as for yourself. It is a constant running hither and thither to meet present and future wants; a suitable position in life can neither be gained nor kept, save through a multitude of distractions and labors. Yes, you are very busy. It is of no consequence to me to hint that your business is not quite as severe and constant as you suppose — that there are many moments which are not busy at all, or busy only with matters which could well be let alone — and that, to one of your religious knowledge, a few moments well improved would be enough for commencing a religious life. I know that one can fill up every moment of the time, during which he is capable of any considerable exertion, with the perplexities and toils of

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his useful calling, so that there shall be strictly no room for effective attention to the concerns of religion. Such is your case. According to your present mode of living there is really no time left for eternity. I do not wonder that such a fact as this offers itself to your notice while you are being urged to repent. What I wonder at is that you should seem to speak of it as a sort of reason for neglecting the concerns of your soul. For, certainly, God can say to you when using such an argument, Out of your own mouth will I judge you.

What sort of a thing is this mighty industry of yours? Has it no other name than *industry?* Your honest calling is doubtless to be diligently followed; but from what quarter comes the information that you may follow it so diligently as to leave no time and energy to prepare for eternity? Surely conscience never whispered it in her most complying moments: surely never did you hear it from that Bible which bids you seek first the kingdom of God. Neither has any charity for that monstrous industry, which, when there is a soul to be clothed with righteousness, spends all in clothing the body — when there is a soul to be fed with that bread that comes down from heaven,

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gives itself altogether to feeding the body with the meat that perishes — when there is a soul to be lifted into honor and riches everlasting, is always straining itself at the poor task of lifting the body into that show and influence which grim death will make a mockery of, not many days hence. What, under the name of diligence, you would fain have taken as good excuse for not promptly repenting, appears before God under the name of crime. That you can consent to shut yourself out so completely from spiritual and heavenly objects shows that your nature is exceedingly disordered and fallen. Will you bring forward the very sinfulness and disorder of your nature as a reason why such sinfulness and disorder should be continued? As well might the sick man point to the fever which is consuming him as an excuse for refusing for the present the medicine which is sure to heal him. It is the very fact of the fever which justifies his friends in urging the medicine upon him; and every new proof they see of the violence of the malady is to them a new ground of urgency. Just so your extreme devotion to the world is a part of that sin, and a symptom of that undone moral condition, which makes repentance and a new heart necessary. When therefore I

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press you to repent, and you answer by pointing at your whole day filled with eager running after temporal good, and at your whole soul filled with temporal cares, may we not at once claim the sad fact as an argument for religion, and beseech you with new zeal to apply without delay the remedy to that disease which already gives such proof of having made alarming progress?

You say truly that "*God is very merciful.*" This is what ministers of the Gospel have been saying loudly ever since there was a Gospel to be ministered. Very pitiful and full of compassion is our God — very forbearing and tender and unwilling that any should come to harm. Never had earthly friend half the enduring gentleness of this our Best Friend — never earthly father half the loving softness and yearning good-will of this our Father in Heaven. That, evil and unthankful as we are, God should so feel toward us and treat us, is indeed a fact of which we should take account. Let us never lose sight of it. Let it be to us what his heavy prize is to the poor slave who washes for diamonds by the rivers of Brazil. He has been promised his liberty if he secures a gem of a certain size; and now that he sees its precious beauty in his hand, how tightly his fingers

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draw around it, and how resolutely he keeps it always in sight till he can deliver it up to his master in exchange for himself! So let us keep ever in our eye, and ever make much of, that wonderful mercy of God which is our only hope. Certainly I do not wonder that such a surpassing fact as this should be before your mind when I ask you to begin a religious life. What I do wonder at is that you should seem to view it as a sort of reason for delaying religion. For, certainly, God can say to you when using such an argument as this, Out of your own mouth will I judge you.

We read that "the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance." However you may use it, His great mercifulness to you is meant to draw you to Himself. Is He wrong in claiming that you should love and serve Him because He is kind and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy? Great favors, intended and conferred, ought to inspire great gratitude, and not encourage alienation. The tender mercifulness of Heaven should break the hardness of your heart, instead of confirming it. You may make it the means of continuing in your heart the winter's cold and barrenness; but oh, you *should* make it the means of bringing to your heart the summer's warmth and

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fruitfulness. You should say, "Since God is so mightily forbearing under my provocations; since He gives me so astonishingly much of good to enjoy when it is so astonishingly much of evil that I deserve; since His attachment to me is so unbounded, His efforts for me so unwearied, His sacrifices for me so stupendous, and His provisions for my whole future being so complete and amazing, I cannot endure to stand any longer in the ranks of His enemies. I have no longer any heart to set at nought His wishes and Spirit. He shall no longer be the only benefactor who gets no advantage from the natural instincts of gratitude which Himself has planted: but the sweet, untiring logic which my sins would fain wrest to their own defense shall be allowed to smite them with all its conquering keenness."

If I ask you to embrace religion, you may begin to express your sense of the "*obscurity of the Scriptures.*" They *are* obscure. No commentary can quite lift from them the veil. No expounding sermon, however simple its Saxon or lucid its thinking, can do it. The study which can master every principle of a human science until it shines almost as clearly as an axiom, soon comes to barriers that cannot be passed when it undertakes to in-

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terpret the text-book of religion. That Book, to all of us, and especially to you, is like a system of hieroglyphics whose alphabet is only as yet partly made out; and, although of wonderful use as it is, and destined to be wonderfully opened to some of us at no distant day, we very often in our reading come on senses to which we have as yet no clew, and are reduced to conjecture what we cannot know. Yes, an obscure Bible is freely admitted. No concealment has ever been attempted. The Bible itself publishes the fact to the four winds, and bids all whom it may concern to take notice. I do not wonder then that your eyes are open to it when I ask you to take the Bible as the supreme rule of your life. What I do wonder at is that you should seem to speak of it as a sort of reason for continuing to live under the guidance of this world. For, certainly, God can say to you when using such an argument as this, Out of your own mouth will I judge you.

The duty of repentance and reformation is clear enough. Clear enough is it that it is the blood of Christ which makes these avail for our salvation. If the obscurity on the face of the Scriptures left you unable to make out what is the first great step you are to take towards securing the holiness and

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happiness of your immortality, then you would be justified in mentioning that obscurity as a reason for inaction. But this is not the point to which darkness belongs. It belongs only to matters quite aside from the plan of salvation — which is left to stand out in such brightness that the humblest intellect need not fail to comprehend it. How can an obscurity like this excuse a man from repenting! I cannot see. But I can see how an obscurity like this condemns a man for not repenting. A new heart is light as well as grace. It is the opening of blind eyes and the unstopping of deaf ears. Nothing which the sinner can do will go so far toward lifting the veil from the face of the Scripture as becoming a Christian. It is true that after that event he will not be without his difficulties of interpretation: but he will have made great progress, and will be on his way to a glorious clearing up of all the mysteries of religion. Personal religion is the best remedy for an obscure Bible. The obscurity is, therefore, a call for the religion, just as a disease is a call for the remedy. When, then, I press you to repent, and you answer by pointing at that general aspect of mysteriousness which the word of God has to your eye, may I not at once claim the fact as an argument for

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religion, and pray you with new importunity to bring to bear upon the dark pages of the sacred volume that light which comes from a heart renewed and inhabited by the Spirit of God?

Are you not a sinner? Should I carry this inquiry around to every person in the Commonwealth I should expect to receive in almost every case an affirmative answer. I receive it from *you*. And yet you have no feeling of mortification or sorrow, are seeking no pardon, are making no effort to be better. — Are not the morality and piety enjoined by Christianity most excellent? To this inquiry also I should get a universal affirmative. And yet you decline to practice either the one or the other in its appropriate motive and spirit; forgetting your God, making no account of His will in your plans, and neglecting to vitalize the outward proprieties of your conduct toward your fellowmen by a spirit of disinterested benevolence. — Is not religion a matter of unspeakable importance? Not a single nay do I hear, but rather a frank confession that there is nothing of equal consequence beneath God's canopy. And yet in practice you make it secondary to everything else; any little diversion or vanity has a better welcome to your thoughts; you will not seek it for yourself nor re-

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commend it to others; you are not troubled by its defeats nor gratified by its successes. — Is this world of any consequence compared with the eternal next? None, none whatever, is the ready answer which your reason, if not your lip, gives with as much decision and unanimity as any body of devout Christians. And yet you are living for this world wholly. You hasten after its vanities as if they were the end of your being. One would think you were at home rather than on a journey. You are wrapped up in these transient successes and disappointments, honors and disgraces, pleasures and sorrows, while the great, the endless, the overpowering events of kindred nature which belong to the world to come are treated almost as if they were fables. Such are your admissions, and such are your doings! What an irreconcilable controversy between them! What stern and sweeping rebuke do your own words minister to your own self! And fear you not that, at some future day, your very candor will be found to have furnished all the materials needed for your summary and clear conviction; and for your adjudgment to the extreme penalties of that Government which knows how to deal with men on the principle, Out of your own mouth will I judge you?

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XXVI.

INDIRECTIONS.

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XXVI.

INDIRECTIONS.

A RIFLEMAN stands and shoots. Before him may be a target, a bird, or a living man. Perhaps the ball will make its way accurately to the very center of the ring or heart; and, on the other hand, it is not at all unlikely that it will miss that center and lodge at considerable distance from it. The chances are that the firing will be more or less of a failure — in nine cases out of ten it will be firing *about* the mark rather than upon it.

A traveler starts on a journey. It may be that he will go forward to the place he would reach on a line altogether direct: and then again it may be that he will strike on some misleading path, and come out some miles to the right or left of his proper destination. Many a wayfarer, especially in a strange country or in the night, instead of coming to his point, has done nothing but travel about it — sometimes to the east and sometimes to the west of it, sometimes near it and

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sometimes far from it. All night he has traveled, and, with morning light and inquiries, he finds himself astray from his goal — at best only in its neighborhood, perhaps no nearer to it than he was the night before, perhaps further from it than ever.

A speaker comes before an assembly. He gives out his subject. It may be that he will drive at once by the shortest line to the marrow of it: and it may be that, instead of coming to the point, he will spend his hour in traveling about it, if not away from it. Often does it happen that the hearer rises from his hearing with the feeling that the man who has been addressing him has been engaged in archery *around* his theme rather than on it. His arguments and illustrations were not in point. He said many good things; they had some sort of neighborhood relation to his topic; but as to striking squarely, or even obliquely, upon it, they did not.

In all these cases of failure to come to the point the failure is not *intended.* An archer means to hit the mark about which his arrows fly, the traveler aims to reach the place about which his steps wander, and even the speaker probably has no set purpose to give the loose and rambling

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speech which actually comes from him. It is apt to be so in all matters of this world. If one does not come to the point he still wishes to do it and tries to do it. There is a lack of ability, of skill, perhaps of industrious effort: but, if mere wishing and general intent that way could send a man's arrow to the very center of the worldly target around which his bow is dealing, it would seldom remain undone. But it is far otherwise in the spiritual affairs of men. Here, too, is abundant failure to come to the point, a vast shooting and traveling *about* religion, but very seldom any real wish and purpose that it should be otherwise. In this field we have two of the worst facts ever met with, viz., a grievous indirection and circumlocution in dealing with the gravest matters, and the coöperation of the will and heart in the same.

The great point for sinners is to make up their minds intelligently and thoroughly, that, with God's help, they will at once break off from all sins as trusters and servants of Christ. But, instead of coming straightly and squarely up to this point, the habit is to beat about it, if not to go directly away from it. A few refuse, perhaps with imprecations, to have anything to do with Christ and His service. They

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pour scorn on religion. They declare there is nothing in it, and they want nothing of it. But these are exceptions. The sinners in our congregations know better than to take such a gloomy stand as this. Possibly they would not take it for the world. Still, they are not quite ready to come to the point of a hearty renunciation of sin and embracing of Christ's service. They think about it from time to time; they hear and read about it in churches, and Bibles, and elsewhere; they have at times not a few good wishes and feelings about it, perhaps they even go so far as to have most excellent resolutions about it — but, after all, the dealing is *about* the point, not at it. It is an indirection, a circumlocution. It is a firing about the mark, a wandering about the place of destination, a talking about the subject. The thing to be done is *to repent at once.* Doing nothing is not coming up to this point. Thinking about repentance is not immediate repentance. Hearing sermons and reading good books is not actual turning to God. Resolving to repent at some future time, definite or indefinite, is not repenting now. Having feeling on the subject of religion, wishing one's self were a Christian, is

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not becoming a Christian. It is merely dealing with the suburbs of the subject. If one never gets any nearer the heart of it than this he will never get at salvation. It is *coming to the point* that saves the soul — not traveling around and around it.

One of the miseries of this indirection and circumlocution is that it is *intentional.* Sinners do not miss the mark through mistake or want of skill, do not travel around and around their place of destination because they cannot find it. Their intentions are at fault. They secretly wish and mean to avoid present action. They dare not forsake the matter of religion altogether, and yet they are not quite ready to act decisively in its favor; so they make a compromise, and move about the point, instead of upon it. Had they fairly meant it, all these men might have come to the point of personal religion years ago. The archer tries to send his arrow to the very center of his mark; the traveler tries to reach the place which he misses; and, for aught I know, the speaker with all his ramblings really tries to keep to his subject. Not so the sinner. His secret, if not open, purpose is to miss the point at issue for the present.

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And why? A soldier is sometimes compelled to fetch a compass on the city or army which he is concerned to take. A traveler cannot by any means always go to his goal on a straight line, or even on one not full of zigzags. But there is no *cannot* in the way of a man coming to the point in the matter of repentance. Your not repenting, O sinner, is not because repentance is not possible; nor is it because it is not right; nor is it because it is not expedient. Why not come to the point, then, straightly and strongly? The truth is, the secret heart shrinks, the will is prone in the opposite direction, temptations are strong, and Satan is active. If the truth must be told, you have no relish for the thing to be done, but the contrary; you are too busy in coming to the point in other things — you must finish such and such enterprises; you want to have as large a taste of the world as possible before quitting it finally.

Sometimes it is no evil at all when the balls of the rifleman deal around the mark, instead of upon it. The traveler often misses his way, and strikes east or west of his true destination to his plain great advantage. And, as to the rambling speaker, his ramblings have been known to be

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very useful — the most useful part of his addresses. At times, however, the failure to come to the point is with much damage. Had Tell failed to hit the apple on his son's head, he would have destroyed both his son and himself. Had Buel failed to come to the critical point of Shiloh, on the night of that fatal Sunday, a whole army would have been sacrificed. Had Newton's teacher failed, on a certain occasion, to come to the point in his instructions, the education of a great philosopher would have been discouraged, and great sciences lost to the world. And if *you* fail to come to the point of repenting and believing — however closely you may approach it in hearing, reading, thinking, discussing, resolving — you will find it a very costly failure. What with the evils it does and threatens, what with its moral sacrifices here and its dangers of all kinds for an eternal hereafter, it is the King and Satan of all failures. Successful! how can *you* talk of success? Whatever you have gained, your life thus far has been a great and growing loss. All earth's gay things are hollow gaud and tinsel unless joined to religion. You may heap them indefinitely, and be never a whit the richer — may heap them indefinitely, and be many de-

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grees the poorer. Success in life consists in carrying out life's great purpose; and you do not make a beginning on this till you cease beating about the suburbs of religion, and come to the point of entering its citadel. However industrious you may be, your time is all thrown away till you actually repent. Your life was given you that you may come and keep to this point; and everything short of this, though it be a coming very near to the mark, is life wasted. And then, while you are busying yourself in wandering about the subject, and coming out east or west, north or south, of it, the time allowed you for coming to the point may come to an end. You cannot trifle with religion forever. You cannot keep up this skirmish with the outposts without losing (perhaps very soon and suddenly) the chance of reaching its central camp. While you stand hesitating and paltering, time is flying, probation is lessening, a *day* longer of mere hearing and considering and intending to do something by and by, may completely cut you off from the opportunity of coming to the point. If it were a common point, such a point as the world daily asks us to come to, and such as worldly people are daily driving at on the straightest lines of ap-

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proach, it were not much to lose the opportunity of reaching it. But this is not such. It is one which if you never come up centrally to, you will never come to anything that deserves to be called virtue, never come to peace with conscience, never come to the favor of God, never come to Heaven. But you will come to Hell — ruin without measure and end. As the speaker who allows himself in rambling gradually loses the faculty of direct and home-thrusting speech — as the archer who allows himself to shoot with unsteady aim at the general neighborhood of the mark rather than at the mark itself, gradually loses skill of eye and hand for fixing the reed in the center of the target — you, by your circuits and circumlocutions, are gradually becoming unapt to any more effective dealing with religion. The habit of indirection is fixing itself. And the ruin to which this tends will be all the worse for the fact that it will, in all probablity, involve others in it. Your not coming to the point will influence some others to do likewise. Your children, your companions, will be apt to content themselves with rambling on the outskirts of religion as you are doing, and in deference to your example.

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And so, just as the fall of one stone down the steep mountain side carries with it other loose stones lying near it, so your fall will carry with it that of relatives and neighbors.

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XXVII.

THE DEMON OF DELAY.

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XXVII.

THE DEMON OF DELAY.

I AM to speak to you about one of the worst enemies of mankind. It is not the angry storm that levels the harvests and the dwellings. It is not the conflagration that greedily laps up the earnings and lives of men, and leaves an ashy waste where lately fair homes and smiling faces gladdened the sight. It is not the pestilence that swiftly decimates the population, and fills houses with mourners and grave-yards with dead. What is it? It is a *demon*. Not one of the demons of the Great Pit: but an earth-born monster, who, while it calls Satan father and king, is as much native to the fields and skies of this world as any of ourselves. It is an airy, impalpable, invisible giant; with cruel phantom features that mock while they murder. It feeds on human beings. The description which Tasso gives of Satan himself would not be out of place for this his child.

"No Alpine crag, terrifically grand,
No rock at sea in size with him could vie;

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Calpe and Atlas soaring from the sand,
Seemed to his stature little hills, so high
Reared he his horned front in that Tartarean sky.
His breath was like those sulphurous vapors born
In thunder, stench, and the live-meteor's light,
When red Vesuvius showers, by earthquakes torn,
O'er sleeping Naples in the dead of night
Funereal ashes — and like the gaping tide
Of a deep whirlpool his grim mouth appeared,
When he unclosed his jaws with foaming gore besmeared."

Such is the monster. Its name is *To-morrow.*

When the claims of the Gospel are brought to men, in not one case in a thousand are they positively and finally rejected. They are simply postponed. There is not the least idea of turning back on them forever. Till a certain stress of business is over; till certain rounds of gayety and pleasure are run; till certain leisures, facilities, opportunities, occur; till the world does not look so attractive; till I am old, or at least older; till the next revival; till God pleases to convert me; till *some* time when it is more convenient, or more agreeable, to repent than it is now — it is some such thought that lies in the minds of most persons when they say to Religion, Go thy way. "For this time," they mean. "When I have a convenient season I will call for thee;" this is what they intend. They are Felixes — generally

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without the trembling of Felix — though sometimes they postpone amid quakings of apprehension fully equal to those which shook the guilty governor as he heard Paul reason of temperance, righteousness, and a judgment to come.

To estimate properly this postponement, which in advance I have called a monster, and a demon, and Satan's own child, let certain facts be weighed.

The risk incurred.

It is the risk of losing the soul — the risk of losing an eternity of holiness and happiness, and of gaining one of sin and misery. This eternity is not a rhetorical and poetical one — some very long period, say ten thousand years or so, which our fancies dress up and dignify with the great name of Forever — but absolutely and literally and astonishingly, duration without end. Nor angel, nor God, shall see the day when the lost sinner, or his supreme sufferings, shall come to an end. All the years of this hoar world; nay, all the years of all the stars that shine, multiplied by all the atoms found in creation from frontier to center, are the merest drop in the ocean of that everlasting existence which the sinner turns to sin and woe, if he happens to die before his set time for repenting shall come, or if the Holy Ghost leaves him before that

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time. Is there no danger of one or the other of these things happening? Sure are you, of living till the next revival, till the next leisure, till that certain *something* which is going to make for you a more convenient season? Ah, how many sudden strokes, how many unexpected death-beds, mock at such sureness as that! Let the Life Assurance Companies, with their tables of risks for every man, teach you wisdom. Some sinners who are always postponing religion could not get their lives insured for a year in any sound company, at any rate of premium. Besides the chances of dying before the set time comes, besides the chances that before that time the Holy Spirit will be finally grieved away, there are the chances (let us say the great probability) that if the sinner reaches unreprobated the time he has postponed to, he will postpone again, and again, and again, till postponement becomes a habit; and, at last—the *door is shut.* Suddenly like the levin from a clear sky, the bolt falls and all is over. Never more strives that Holy Ghost. Perhaps life itself has drawn its last breath, and eternity has begun. The soul from out its fires looks back on a probation forever gone, looks up toward a Heaven forever lost.

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Such risk incurred for no corresponding advantage.

To take risks is nothing unusual for wise men. It is almost always the condition of gains. But then there should be something to take the risk for. The advantage to be gained should bear some proportion to the greatness of the risk. No wise man willingly takes risks for nothing. No wise man willingly takes enormous risks for the sake of trifling and doubtful advantage. What advantage does the sinner have in view by that postponement which risks his soul? Is it something which if gotten will pay for such a huge danger? Is it really any advantage at all — anything that deserves to be called by that honorable name! The pleasures (so called) of sin for a season — mixed up with so many bitter remorses and penalties and fears that one feels all the while that the way of trangessors is hard, and that the wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt — this on the one hand as the consideration, and the risk of a ruined eternity on the other for an outlay! Will this do? I *challenge* you to show a man, not lunatic nor idiot, from the birth of time till now, who would consent in matters of this world to

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anything like such disproportion between the hazard taken and the consideration offered. The consideration is a mere mote. It is so small I cannot see it. It is one of those doubly-refined nothings, one of those zeros of the thousandth grade, which mathematicians speak of, but which they always cast out of their calculation. Surely Satan himself must wonder at the amazing cheapness at which he is able to buy immortal souls. It astonishes Heaven — I think it must astonish Hell. The most shocking and at the same time the most ridiculous, of all bargains! That famous transaction in which Esau for one morsel of meat sold his birthright gives just the phantom of a shadow of a shade of this case. That was *real* meat though but a morsel. That was but an *earthly* inheritance, though it was Abraham's. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; for my people have committed *two* evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters; and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" — that is to say, they have parted with the greatest imaginable good for the smallest imaginable, for mere emptiness.

No one can afford to risk his all for anything

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— much less for nothing. It is understood among business men to be a sound maxim never to embark a whole estate in a single venture, however great the temptation may be. "Use only such sums in speculation as you can afford to lose. Keep the bulk of your interests on solid ground. Never allow yourself to be betrayed by any flattering appearances into putting all you have in the world to hazard." It is thus men counsel each other. Does the man act on this sound principle who, by postponing repentance, puts his soul and eternity in jeopardy? His soul and eternity are his all. What shall a man give in exchange for his soul! If that is wrecked he is a total wreck. No one can afford to risk that great estate for anything beneath the azure heaven — much less for a trifle, much less for so empty and bitter a nothing as the so-called pleasures of sin for a season. They have no substance to them. They are a proved cheat of the Great Adversary. And what the sinner actually gets by his postponement, often, is not so much the sinful pleasures themselves, empty as they are, as a lying promise of them. Satan promises him a morsel of meat, but at last cheats him out of both that and Paradise — Paradise, that glorious birthright of his. Men

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cannot afford to deal after such an amazing and destructive fashion.

A risk so plain in itself, and to which the sinner's attention is so loudly called.

Is it at all obscure that the postponer of religion does jeopardize his soul and eternity? I could count you out scores, not to say hundreds, of passages in the Scriptures that so affirm or imply it that they have compelled for it almost universal belief throughout the Christendom of every age on which history or tradition throws light. It is hard to say what is plainly taught in the Bible if not that sinners are in a perishing condition, from which repentance and faith alone can raise them — that as long as one remains impenitent he is a 'child of wrath' and an 'heir of death' — that if he dies in his sins he will 'lift up his eyes in torment and find an impassable gulf separating him from Heaven.' It is a fact in which all the great Christian Denominations are agreed that this life is man's only probation — that if in any way he allows it to slip unchristianized through his hands there is nothing but ruin beyond; nothing but to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power." God has taken care that a fact so im-

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portant should be plainly written out; and that, not once nor twice nor thrice, but a hundred times. He meant to have it clear to the poorest grade of sight; and He has made it so. Not indeed so plain that every one *must* see it (for that would have been impossible), but so plain that every one ought to see it without the slightest trouble. And He has, if possible, made it still more plain that there is no man alive who can afford to take the risk of so tremendous a loss as that of the soul, for any consideration whatever; for Satan's most magnificent promises, and, what is a very different thing, his performances; for all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them — that, much less is there a living man who can afford to take such a risk for such a bitter and beggarly nothing as the pleasures of sin for a season. To whom is this not the plainest of plain things? It flames out in the convictions of mankind beyond all possibility of denial or doubt. Still, to do the very best for the truth and the sinner, that the case admits of, God is always reminding the sinner of the plain fact of the mighty risk attending his postponements; also of the still plainer fact that he cannot afford a venture so extravagantly enormous, especially with nothing

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but a painted cipher for compensation. He refreshes his memory sabbath by sabbath. He prompts him on the subject in sermons, in exhortations, in books, in prayers, in hymns, in providences, in secret strivings of the Holy Ghost — prompts him morning, noon, and night. If God can help it, the plain truth shall not lie asleep in him. He shall see it earnestly facing him and pleading with him at every turn. So does he see it. Thousands and thousands of times a year he sees these solemn ideas flitting across his field of view. Sometimes, like Balaam's angel, they block up the path of his postponements as with drawn swords in their hands. "Go forward if you dare," say they. "Turn back, rash mortal," say they, "if you value your life. Do you want to be smitten and perish everlastingly." And the sheen of those brandished weapons carries fears and tremblings to his heart.

Under such circumstances it is that sinners make their postponements of religion. Behold a speculation in which everything is risked on the one side for nothing on the other! What shall we say of it? What *can* we say of it that is not full of disrespect and censure? It is madness against reason — against almost everything save

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general example and native depravity. It is the most extravagant venture the creation of God ever saw.

I have spoken of the *monster* of procrastination. I have even called it a *demon* — it is so vastly illusive, monstrous, and destructive. Though earth-born, it lives from generation to generation with unabated vitality. The combat with it which the servants of God wage is a combat with a phantom. Blows and swords seem to pass through it without wounding. Not so its strokes. The phantom sword which it waves draws life-blood in every direction. It is the Moloch of Christendom? If any other enemy of Christ and man among us has slain its thousands, this red-handed Postponement has slain its ten thousands. It is now slaying greedily in every parish of the land. And yet the stroke is so noiseless, so phantom-like, that men scarcely notice the destruction that is taking place. Are you another Felix, saying to Religion, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee?" Are you one of these enormous risk-takers for nothing, and less than nothing — while the warnings of Scripture and of the Holy Ghost are ever pealing like fire-bells in your ears? Do not let the slaughter go

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on quite to its consummation. Do not let the demon triumph over you to the very article of death. You have dallied enough with such mighty risks — have done with it. Let the ruinous experience of others satisfy you without your going further. For years you have been postponing religion against the commonest rules of prudence, nay in defiance of them; hanging your eternity on this little thread of your life which is every moment getting more slender and brittle. Have you not done enough of such terrible venturing? The time is coming — will be upon you ere you are aware — when your hazard of ruin will suddenly turn to a certainty of it. Instead of being told simply that there is great danger of destruction, you will awake to the conviction that it is *too late* to escape it. The ruin so long impending, so long toyed with, has actually fallen. The soul is lost. Instead of being now a case of mysterious and awful speculation in which an eternity is wagered against a painted straw, it is a case of mysterious and awful catastrophe in which both the eternity and the straw are actually sacrificed. What fiery tempests toss you now? What self-accusings, what unbounded regrets, what despairing wonder over past rashness and present ruin, what agoniz-

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ing measurements of a slowly uncoiling forever ungilded by a single ray of hope? My friend! thank God that this time has not yet *quite* come. There is still one opportunity of salvation left. Let not the murderous demon, whose name is To-morrow, cheat you out of that. "*To-day*, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

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XXVIII.

CONSOLIDATION OF SINFUL CHARACTER.

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XXVIII.

CONSOLIDATION OF SINFUL CHARACTER.

LET me call your attention to one of the most interesting facts connected with human nature, and one of the most important in its bearings on our religious interests. I mean the gradual consolidation of character as we advance in life. And this whether the character be good or bad. If good, it is every day getting firmer fiber, and deeper root; and if bad, not a day passes but sees it laying hold of the soil of the heart with new rootlets, and shooting upward a heavier and hardier growth. You can cut it down with less sweat and dulling of your steel now than you can tomorrow. You can pry it out of its place with less of strain and delay and broken levers at this moment than you can a week hence.

I will at present limit myself to one section of this general fact — to the gradual consolidation and growth of a *bad* character.

At the outset, you will notice as a fact open to

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all eyes that there are at least some characters which are continually sinking, sinking, to the very end of life. Who is this man swinging from the gallows? Why, it is the boy of many years ago of whom his neighbors knew little save that he was an idle and ill-governed lad. As he grew older he was occasionally heard of as mischievous, vulgar, and truant. Then, by degrees, he became known as a sabbath-breaker, foul-mouthed, insolent, and profane; perhaps dishonest in a small way. After a while, it was told one morning that he had disappeared from his home and gone to sea; and nobody, save his parents, was sorry, for the place would be better without him. Once abroad, he plunged into bolder and larger vice, gradually passed to be a ringleader among the bad, grew from year to year more insubordinate, irregular, fierce, and careless of God and man; until at last, a bloody pirate, he became the terror of the seas, and it was necessary to hunt him down like a wild beast. And this is he dangling by the neck — never so bad as he was the day he died.

Enter any one of a thousand houses in a great city, and you will find a person all eaten up by vice, who, if you could follow back his history to

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the beginning, would be seen to have reached his present depths by a gradual subsidence of his character from the plane of respectability, without any perceptible break of improvement or even rest — always sinking, sinking, like some island of volcanic base which each year settles a few inches into the waters, until at last the highest point disappears from sight, and slimy sea-monsters people its caves and homes.

That there are many instances of this kind will be readily granted. But are they as many as there are bad characters in the world? Do all bad characters keep going down, down, just as long as they are held — not a moment of upward movement, not even a moment of standing still; though in many cases making no such profound descents as those just described? "How can this be! Some characters, I must admit, do seem to go down in this way from bad to worse without cessation. But there are multitudes of sinners whom I have known, in whom, as years passed away, I could make out no change for the worse. I have known them ten, twenty, forty years, and they are not yet Christians; but I am not able to make out that in any respect they are morally at a lower point than they were that long time ago.

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Besides, I am consciously not a Christian myself, but I am not conscious of having grown any worse for a number of years. It seems to me that, at least, I am no further from religion than I was twenty years since. My life, for aught I can see, is as fair, and my heart as awake and friendly to good things, as it ever was. In a word, if I can trust my observation and consciousness, there are persons, and these a large part of Christian communities, whose characters are impenitent and so in a gospel sense bad, but who yet are not subject to that constant decline which is claimed."

My friend! do you conclude that the steam is not increasing in this stout iron boiler, because, for a long time, there is no change in its appearance to you standing half across the room? If you were a skilled engineer, and stood close to the vessel, you might perhaps be able to detect some signs that the white vapor within is every moment getting more dense and destructive: but, as it is, you see not the least sign of such progress. The fires glow behind the wall, the vapor forms, the energy within strains and rages more and more; but to you the dull inclosing metal looks as dull and unstrained as ever. Now, character is wholly an inward thing. It is strongly girded in by the

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body, and social rules, and barriers of respectability. And, standing as you do at a distance, and looking as you do only on the outward with a no very skilled spiritual discernment, it is not strange that you should fail to see signs of the increase of the moral evil, though that increase is constant.

Further. You say that your impenitent neighbor looks as fairly to you as he did twenty years ago. Are you sure that your memory serves you well in regard to that distant period? It may be that you can recall nothing but some vague generalities of fact and impression; and that many details, many subtle shades and odors manifestive of character which then hovered about the man's daily life, have quite gone from your thought. That you may fairly compare the present and the past you must know the past. And, if you say that your memory has to do rather with the judgment you formed at that past time than with the facts on which the judgment was based; and that, though the facts are largely forgotten, the single impression you took from them is as clear as if taken yesterday, then I ask you to consider another fact. According to the doctrine in question, your *standard* of moral judgment has been changing continually. You judged the man twenty

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years ago by a very different and truer standard than you use upon him now. Being an impenitent sinner yourself, you have sunk in character about as fast as he has. Going down yourself, you have carried down with you the rule by which moral things are measured. A given sin seems smaller to you than it did years ago: a greater sin seems only as large. So when you come to measure the changed character by a changed rule you are sensible of no alteration. The proportions of things are preserved. The difference of level between your character and his remains the same. So no change in his character appears to you. So none appears to the man himself. He has the same changed standard to measure by that you have; and when he looks about on his neighbors he sees himself as high in respect to most of them as he ever was. Shall he presume to say that his depravity has not grown?

Let him go out to-morrow into some young wood, and look about him. Let him pluck a willow branch, and apply it as a measure to such tree as he may choose. How much do you say? Once and so much over? Now force an end of the branch into the soft, damp earth and leave it. Next spring the dry stick will put out roots,

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and grow as only willows by the water-courses can — as fast as any well-planted tree in that wood. For all those trees will grow; and, being of the same kind and in the same influences of soil and air, sun and rain, they will all grow about equally fast. Accordingly, when, after years have gone, you again come among them, you find no change in their proportions in respect to each other: and when you have pulled up by the roots your old measuring rod, now well-grown, and have applied it to the same tree as before, you still find it measuring out, "once and so much over," just as at the first. What then? Will you declare that through all these years the tree has not grown a particle? Will you forget that your willow has grown, and that all the trees have grown, and that relative rest is not inconsistent with absolute progress?

The more we think of it the less inclined we shall be to doubt that a man may alter very greatly for the worse in respect to character, and yet be himself altogether unconscious of the fact. Is there anything better known than that vices are apt to lose something of their first look of enormity by practice, or even by familiarity? How soon will the profanity, which at first hearing

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shocks the well-taught child, seem a small thing to him, if he continues hearing it! Very likely he almost trembles when he utters his first oath. But a short practice will make him think very lightly of that kind of sin. When you first step out into the dark, how very dark it is! Only stay out a while, however, and you lose much of that painful sense of obscurity. And yet it is really as dark as it ever was — nay darker, for since you came out clouds have come to cover the whole sky. When you first enter a sick-room, how sensible you are of the bad air! Only stay a while and the fevered smell will disappear. Why? Because there is less virus in the air than when you entered it? Nay, the air is worse than ever — only you are getting used to it. A man brought up in Birmingham does not perceive that the city is more cloudy and sooty and badly scented than it was forty years ago: and yet many times the old number of furnaces are belching out night and day their clouds of cinders and smoke with pestilent gases. His senses grow blunt just as fast as the air grows corrupt. How credible then is it that a person living in sin may not notice an increase of sin within him, even though that increase is very great! His conscience and

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consciousness gradually accommodate themselves to the increasing corruption. Though his darkness, and fever-air, and Birmingham, are at this moment worse than ever, he is quite ignorant of the change — even thinks, perhaps, that on the whole his character is gradually gaining.

He may be encouraged in this view of his case by the fact that he finds himself less attached than formerly to certain particular forms of sin which he could mention, and has even broken off entirely from some one or more of them. With much satisfaction he reflects that since he was a young man he has left off some bad habits: he has become more industrious, less devoted to pleasure, less passionate. Perhaps he can point to some great vice that he has quite put away. Perhaps he can challenge the community whether he is not a more useful and properly-conducted person by far than he once was. And so he may flatter himself that, on the whole, his character has gained; though he feels that as yet he has had no positively Christian experience. Without denying, but on the contrary affirming, that all these changes are excellent things, still it is easily seen that they warrant no such inference as is drawn from them. Cannot you cut off one or more

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branches from a tree, and yet have the tree growing all the while? You may even cut away a whole side of limbs, and yet have that tree getting more solid of fiber and strong of root every moment. So you may lop off particular faults of character to a large extent without stopping the growth of that which is the main trunk of your depravity. The fear of God may be getting less and less, while the fear of man is getting greater and greater. Your indifference to duty may be getting more set and stony, though your regard to health, comfort, and the good opinion of society may be on the increase, and drawing you to prefer a more quiet and reputable style of sinning. Many particular reforms are merely substitutions of one kind of sin for another, just as destructive in its bearings on the Divine Government, though less immediately pernicious to men.

But look at the positive evidence. And first there is the plain and broad Scripture, *Evil men wax worse and worse.* Even as the good go from strength to strength till they appear in Zion before God, even as the path of the just is like the shining light shining more and more to the perfect day; just so there is a steady movement on the part of sinners downward.

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If we choose to take a step further and appeal to observation, we at once find there are natural laws in force which cannot but secure a gradual sinking of character in the case of every sinner, as long as he clings to his sins. It is a law as potent and resistless as that which binds the planets in their orbits, that every mental principle grows by action. The understanding grows by action: so do memory and imagination and the emotional nature: and so do unbelief and selfishness and indifference to God and alienation of heart from the truth. Whatever be that thing in the soul which you consider to be the last essence of sin — that principle, by a law of nature just as sure in its operation as that which carries a free stone to the ground, will fasten itself upon you with new firmness with every new exercise. And the growth and consolidation must also, from the nature of the case, be a constantly accelerated one. When a stone falls to the earth it does not pass over equal spaces in equal times, but keeps going ever faster and faster. A sinful heart moves downward after the same manner — ever faster and faster. The exercise strengthens the depravity, and the stronger the depravity the more it exercises itself, and the more the exercise the

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greater the growth. In addition to this law of exercise there is another law contributing to the same result. Whatever gratification is abnormal becomes less and less easily produced by the means first used. The spices that stimulate the appetite to unnatural edge you must keep constantly increasing if you would continue the same amount of effect. The child who uses them freely will require to use them enormously when he has grown into a man. Just so the gratification peculiar to sin keeps requiring more and more sin for its production. As the measure of intoxicating liquor which pleasantly excites the tippler today must be doubled a few years hence to secure an equal excitement — as the measure of gain which now delights the worldling must be increased, perhaps many fold, to give him equal pleasure after pursuit of gain for a life-time — as the measure of retaliation which now gives a dismal satisfaction to a revengeful man must be greatly increased to satisfy him equally after his mind has long hardened in the practice of revenge — so, whatever the sinful gratification you choose, you cannot keep it at a given level without increasing the amount of that sort of sinning on which it depends. The craving for the forbidden indulgence grows ever stronger, but the pleasure

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of yielding to it becomes ever weaker: so that you are ever being driven forward on intenser and still intenser, as well as more frequent, acts of the sin. Keep on, and by the force of this law you will do as many transgressions in a day as you are now doing in a month or a year, and they will be spiced with a sharper quality of depravity.

If your ox, or your horse, has a bad habit, the older he is the less hope you have of breaking him of it. If the animal has seen but a single year, almost anybody would undertake to cure him; but if he has seen twenty years of biting, jumping, stumbling, who will care to undertake the task then?—Take your child to a teacher and ask him to correct a bad gait and pronunciation. "How old is he?" "Only ten." Oh yes, he will undertake it, and will even *engage* to bring him back to you, after a few months, erectly walking and pleasantly speaking. But if, instead of that supple child, you should take with you a bronzed man who for sixty years has had the same unfortunate habits — would the master of calisthenics and elocution make you any promises then? He will *try;* perhaps some improvement can be effected; but, as to any great changes, he is afraid the man is too far gone in life for them.—It will not greatly disturb you if you find your little boy, just

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entered of school, somewhat superficial in his studies. You have faith that a reasonable effort on your part will break up the fault. But should that son pass through the district school, the academy, the college, the professional school, and then you some day wake up to the fact that he never goes to the marrow of any subject, but is a mere desultory dealer about the surface of things, you would need a brave heart to set about reforming his way of study at that stage.

And now it is but this wide-spread law, everywhere recognized and acted on, that the Scriptures ask us to regard as ruling the *moral* world. Bad principles in the heart, sinful traits in the life, like bad bodily or intellectual habits, consolidate and strengthen with time, and become continually harder to remove. The rock now but paste is gradually cooling into granite — the iron now soft and flexile by heat of youth and Gospel is gradually absorbing the dark particles which harden it into steel. Take warning, man — you who are looking forward to a distant time when it will be far easier than it is now to turn from your sins. Will God suspend in your favor the laws of Nature? Methinks I see that distant time, which is to do so much for you, come, and lo, you are dead, or, if not dead, a *stone!*

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XXIX.

NO SACRIFICE TOO GREAT FOR RELIGION.

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XXIX.

NO SACRIFICE TOO GREAT FOR RELIGION.

IT is not uncommon for people to use, in regard to one thing and another, such expressions as the following: It is not worth what it costs. He paid too dearly for it. It costs more than it comes to. It is too expensive; I cannot afford it. I cannot go beyond that price; it is all the thing is worth to me. Need I say that such language as this cannot properly be used by any person in regard to *religion?* It may cost you very much to become a truly regenerate and Christian person: but of this be assured that it cannot cost you so much but that, when the balance is struck, you will be found infinitely the gainer.

The time has been when men have been called on to sacrifice the *dearest ties* for the sake of religion. When Adam found that Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit he was at once put on deciding whether he would separate their lots in life. He

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had to choose between his companion and his religion. — When God said to Abram in Haran, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house into a land that I will show thee," He put the patriarch under the necessity of choosing between his country and relatives and friends on the one hand, and his obedience to God on the other. It was a great sacrifice to make, but Abram concluded to give up the ties of home and country and to keep his religion. Still later, he was called to consider whether he would not make a still greater sacrifice in the same behalf. Said God to him, Sacrifice thy son Isaac to the principle of religious obedience. And he did it. Though it must have torn his heart-strings almost beyond expression, he promptly made up his mind to that sore martyrdom. — At the present day, in heathen lands, many a person is called to choose between the father and mother who stand ready to cast him out of home and heart, and that Christ who says, He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. On the one hand, say the parents, If you become a Christian we will disown you ; you shall no longer be son of ours — on the other hand, Jesus says, If you do not be-

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come a Christian, you can have no part in my salvation. And some of these persons conclude to sacrifice relatives and home in favor of religion. Have you never heard of a like hard choice being placed before people even in this Christian land? I have heard of parents forbidding their children, and husbands their wives, to embrace religion under penalty of loss of favor, and even of having the home doors forever closed against them. And sometimes persons in a strait betwixt two have decided to save their souls rather than their homes; and have gone out unsheltered into premature orphanage and widowhood for sake of Christ and religion. I think, *wisely*. I consider that they made an immense gain by their choice. The sacrifice was great; but the prize gained by it was so wonderfully greater, that, on strictly commercial principles, it would have been the extreme of folly to have acted differently. Abram forsaking country and father's house and only son; converts from heathenism, foreign and domestic, consenting to be rudely pushed forth from their homes, and all, rather than not have the good part which cannot be taken away, were wise in their generation. For, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

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The time has been when men have been called to sacrifice the *highest honors* for the sake of religion. To-day the Pope of Rome is really called on by God to renounce his character as antichrist, and to become a Christian man. What does such a summons mean? It means that he lay aside his triple crown, his spiritual despotism, the homage he receives and the authority he exercises as vicegerent of Christ. On no other terms can he become a Christian. — Henry of Navarre thought it a question whether he could retain both his Protestantism and the crown of France. As it lay in his mind, a *choice* was to be made between the scepter of Charlemagne and the true Christian doctrine and life. He decided to keep his kingdom and to lose his religion. — Paul, the talented scholar of Gamaliel, the zealous and brilliant partisan of the great and powerful — will this ambitious young man give up all his prospects, and even chances, of worldly promotion in order to be Christ's? This was really the choice submitted to him. He decided for Christ. — Dionysius, the Areopagite, sitting under the preaching of this converted Paul, what shall he do? He may give up his Areopagus, or he may reject the offers of the Gospel. He cannot hope to retain that fa-

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mous and honorable post among the Athenians if he becomes a disciple of Jesus. He decides to sacrifice the honor for the sake of the religion. — Then there was Moses, a nursling of the Pharaohs, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and deeds, a very prince in the land — would he remain a prince, or would he suffer affliction with the people of God, as one of them. He chose the latter with a right princely determination. He sacrificed his honors to his principles. — There is to-day a heathen chief, or crown-prince, or prince imperial, who would forfeit his right of succession should he embrace the pure Gospel in a saving way. What had he better do? Is there the smallest doubt what course would on the whole be wisest? Suppose antichrist should become a Protestant penitent, and, in consequence, lose his tiara and super-regal dominion — suppose Henry the Fourth of France had chosen to remain plain Henry of Navarre and a Christian, instead of becoming the successor of Charlemagne and an apostate — indeed, suppose any man had offered to him what Satan offered Jesus, viz., all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, in exchange for religion and eternal life, and that he, like Jesus, should curtly refuse

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the offer — has any sensible man anything to say against the prudence and judiciousness of such a step? I know that Paul and Dionysius and Moses acted wisely. And I know that there can be but one opinion on the case, among such as will take the trouble to look intelligently across the portals of eternity. For, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

The time has been when men have been called on to sacrifice the *largest estates* for the sake of religion. O young man of the Gospel, go and sell all thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven — not otherwise! Christ probably saw that the spirit of covetousness had so intrenched itself in that heart that nothing short of the amputation of his great possessions could save the man. Hence it was that he was put under this severe necessity of choosing between his property and his salvation.—O Zaccheus, rich with ill-gotten gains, the half of whose goods has possibly come by crooked and unjust means, and some of which no doubt have come by wanton accusation and extortion, what must you do to have eternal life? Why, you must repent and do works meet for repentance — that is, under the circumstances of the case, you must stand and say,

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Lord, the one half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore him fourfold. To him the question of religion was a question of sacrificing the greater part of his great estate. He decided that it was best to make the sacrifice and have salvation come to his house. — In those furious persecutions of Christianity which raged during the first three centuries, and especially in that most furious of all under the emperor Decius, as well as in some of Huguenot and Puritan times, Christianity meant fines and confiscations to the last obolus and centime and penny. The peril of being stripped of every item of property was almost universal among Christians. And you know that, in the strait betwixt two, great numbers boldly decided to part with their property and keep the religion, and took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in Heaven a better and an enduring substance. — Have we never heard in these days of *conscience-money?* Why does the Government receive every year large sums through the post-office with information that it is the principal and interest of money wrongfully taken? It is because those wrong-doers have had thrust upon them the ques-

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tion whether they will keep the money, or will have religion and its resulting salvation. They found it necessary to make a choice. And rather than remain unrepentant, unreformed, and unsaved sinners, they put their hands into their coffers and took out (in some instances, perhaps) every dollar they were worth. Did these men make a wise choice? Did Zaccheus do a judicious thing? Did the young man in the Gospel make a great mistake in sorrowfully refusing to part with all his great possessions for the sake of eternal life? Did the men of persecuting times who took Christ and His religion to their hearts at the expense of houses and lands, of comforts and necessaries, and went forth from their palaces mere beggars — did these men make a common sense and commendable decision? I say, *Yes*. I consider that there was never yet a fortune worth as much as religion. And I consider, too, that a man is *infatuated* who thinks otherwise. Suppose you own the solid world with its innumerable acres and forests and dwellings and wares and mines and mints and banks and national exchequers — suppose you own the Solar System, and all the Systems that ever shot painted ray into your uplifted eye — I know that you would act a very unwise part

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should you not stand ready, on occasion, to part with the whole tremendous property for the sake of salvation. For, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

The time has been when men have been called on to sacrifice the *happiest lives* for the sake of religion. It has been an essential part of religion in all ages — an open confession of Christ and His doctrine. "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." The glorious martyrs understood it; and did not shrink from the cross, the stake, the wild beasts. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain by the sword — after wandering about in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth, clad in sheep-skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. It was, all things considered, their choice. They were put on the necessity of choosing between Christ on the one hand, and life on the other. So they chose Christ and death, death not unfrequently with his most terrible visage. There was Carthaginian Perpetua, for example, whose life was crowned with the happiest gifts of fortune — with youth and health and wealth and rank and culture and love — what a life

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that was to be thrown to the wild beasts! But that Christian heroine had heard that he who loses his life for Jesus' sake and the Gospel's shall save it — had heard that whosoever confesses Jesus before men shall be confessed before the angels of God. This was enough. With dauntless heart she cast the die. Nothing could swerve her from her decision. The hardest words and the softest; argument, persuasion, and menace; the dungeon, torture, and time; they all spent themselves on her in vain. She could not, and she would not, give up her religion. Just like the prophet Daniel! With eyes wide open on the den of lions, he went into his chamber, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God as aforetime. When it came to choosing between his religion and his life — great and glorious as that life was, and horrible as was the guise in which death stalked toward him — he did not hesitate. Was Daniel an enthusiast? Was Perpetua's conduct a piece of extravagance? Nay, such choice as theirs was soberest and healthiest good sense. They were infinitely the gainers by the transaction. I consider that there is not one who could not afford, a thousand times over, to part with such a life as he has, however beauti-

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ful and noble and prosperous and happy the life may be, rather than part with his soul. For, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

The dearest ties, the highest honors, the largest possessions, the happiest lives — yes, religion is worth infinitely more than any or all of these. It sometimes happens that all these earthly treasures are mingled in the cup of one man; and what I have to say is, that should he at any time find this great *all* of his standing in the way of his salvation, it would be, beyond dispute, his wisdom to dash his full cup to the earth as strongly and promptly as if it were so much refuse pottery, instead of the jeweled chalice that it is. Every apostle would have done it — every Christian martyr would have done it. Old Testament Abraham would have done it, with even his imperfect light on the wonders of a future state. And we — how much more should we do it, at our noon of salvation! Eternity is so long, Heaven is so bright, Christ is so wondrously fair, and religion so wondrously rich and high — ought not every sensible man to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, the Lord? I will not undervalue these terrestrial things. Allow them

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to be as valuable as the most enthusiastic votary of the world can venture to claim in the presence of intelligent people. Still, the total of them is worth infinitely less than the soul. What *can* a man give in exchange for that! Survey, ye geographers and astronomers! Compute, ye mathematicians! Imagine, ye poets! There is nothing within the orbed immensity of these great girdling heavens worth as much as a soul — but a soul!

Are you ready for *any* sacrifices rather than lose your salvation, or even peril it? You ought to be. Much more ought you to be ready for such comparatively small sacrifices as are commonly demanded in this age and country. What is it you are called on to do? You must thoroughly repent, no doubt. And a thorough repentance is, doubtless, a taking up of the cross; for it is a breaking off from life-long habits of sin, a tearing up by the roots of old tastes and affections, an amputation of favorite lusts of every name. But other persons have had to make these sacrifices, and vastly more. Meet the smaller demand on you in something of their spirit — in something of the spirit born of that solemn inquiry, What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

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XXX.

WHERE DO I EXPECT TO SPEND MY ETERNITY?

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XXX.

WHERE DO I EXPECT TO SPEND MY ETERNITY?

A SHORT time since, in turning over a Bible which lay in the public room of a hotel, I noticed some pencil-writing on the inside of the cover. With some difficulty I made out the meaning. It was a question — one not unfit to be found in company with Bibles — this question, *Where do I expect to spent my eternity?*

The characters were nearly gone. Months, and perhaps years, had passed since they were traced. One day, it may be, that room was full of strangers. Some were bending over their newspapers; some were looking out into the busy street; some were talking of goods and markets; nearly all had the thoughts and feelings of this world plainly written in their faces. There was one exception. He was, I conjecture, a plain, common man. He sat retired with a book on his knee, and certain awkward letters forming under his hand. None of your careless, worldly, hard

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faces was that; but one mellowed by the mingled gravity and tenderness of religious thought. He had been thinking of the soul — how inestimable its value; how profound and widespread the neglect of it, especially among those engaged in bustling business. And as he mused, he felt that even he had a call to do something in behalf of the perishing. There were many things he could not do — his station and faculty did not permit — but if he should trace a word of warning on that white page, might not some roving eye be caught by it, and find it a word in season? So he thought what he should write — something that would strike the mind promptly; something that would readily linger in the memory, and haunt the conscience. *Where do I expect to spend my eternity* — what more nervous and arresting inquiry than this! So he wrote it. He looked up for a blessing on his bow-drawing at a venture, on his seed-sowing beside all waters, and went his way.

In course of time that writing of his met many eyes. Wearied with the news-sheet, wearied with gazing abroad, wearied with their own thoughts, many, at one time and another, betook themselves to turning over the ready Bible, and chanced on

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the penciled-words designed for them. They spelled them out. With various results. To one they were only so much alphabet. The solemn, searching question got no further than the eye: was never answered, nor even asked, within the mind itself. With unshaken indifference on every feature, the reader closed the Book and forgot what he had seen. Another came. As his eye caught the rude penciling a sneering smile wreathed his lips. He held it up for his companion to see and laugh at also. "What cant!" "What ludicrous simplicity!" So they made merry together. After a while a third came — to be vexed at what amused the others. What right had one to spring upon him such an unpleasant idea! He felt toward the writer of that little postscript as toward an officious and insulting intermeddler. With abrupt gesture he put the Book from him. But another came and looked; and, as his eye gradually took in the sense of that rude writing, there rose to his face an expression of grave and startled thought, which deepened as he mused. He went forth to his business, but still you might have read in his looks, *Where do I expect to spend my eternity?* Do what he would, the searching question would not leave him. The arrow was

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barbed. The life preserver pressed with the hand below the surface *would* shoot up again to view the moment the hand was withdrawn. So at last it proved a preserver of life to him. One day he was seen with a new aspect, grasping the Cross. The next he was seen bearing that Cross — even crucifying upon it himself and the world.

In hope that this last effect may be produced again, I have determined to put to you the question which I found written for travelers. The ancestors have gone, a few years hence not one of us will be left — where, I ask, are you counting on being then and ever after? You can project your thoughts a great way into the future. You are accustomed to do it, and to picture to yourself how this country, or the world, will look a century or two hence. Do you ever imagine where and what you will be when the index on the great dial of the ages points to the year 1975?

Where do you expect to spend your eternity? Do not hear this question with *indifference.* Did it involve a shrewd suggestion as to the way of getting property and rising in the world, there would be no occasion for this admonition. As it is there is great occasion. Some of those whose eyes chanced to rest on the faint pencilings of that

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hotel Bible were as little interested in them as if they had been the unmeaning scrawl of childhood; and, in a few moments, forgot that so weighty a question had ever been put to them. Let it not be so with you, as I translate that writing into speech and bring it to your own door. — Do not hear it with *levity and sneer of heart*, as if it were religious cant and a detected device for entrapping the weak and timid into unnecessary seriousness. You never had a more honest and grave question knocking at your gate. Methinks I see now the slighting smile with which one read it, awkwardly written on the cover of that hotel Bible — a disdainful smile which would not have been seen had the writer chosen to pencil a line of a ditty, or a maxim of Chesterfield. The putting forward and pressing of a *religious* sentiment — it was for this the poor mistaken scorner kept his merriment and derision. Let it not be so with you. No, not even in your heart make light of that great, solemn, honest question which I have quoted into speech and brought to sound its trumpet in your ear. — Do not hear this with a *vexed and sore heart*, as if it were an impertinence to thrust so unpleasant a topic upon you. Who can think so? Must not the wound be probed?

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Must not the danger be spoken of? I think I see now the flushing displeasure with which some turned away from the penciled Bible where the unknown friend had set holy ambush against their sin and danger. Let it not be so with you as the written inquiry becomes vocal, appeals to you as it were by name, says loudly and says often, *And where do you expect to spend your eternity?* Entertain the question. Give it free scope upon your judgment and heart and conscience. Answer it, answer it faithfully; and, if the answer should not be such as you could wish, let it be your effort to create, through Divine grace, the basis of a better answer in time speedily to come.

There are certain things which make this question one of the most imposing ever addressed to you. In familiar talk we sometimes mean by "eternity" only a very long time. But the eternity with which our question deals is a very different matter. It is a *real* eternity — that which in the Scriptures is used to express the unending duration of God and His Government. It is as many thousands of years as there are atoms in all worlds, and spaces for atoms in all infinite space. Think of this when you are asked, *Where do you expect to spend your eternity?*

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If this bodily life becomes distasteful to you, you can without difficulty escape from it. In less time than is taken to tell of it you can stretch yourself breathless and motionless, dead. But you cannot escape from eternity. Choose it or not, your conscious existence must last forever. Summon to your aid every conceivable engine of self-destruction — enlist against yourself all the fiery, furious powers of nature — struggle for annihilation like a giant, and get all your fellow-creatures to join their wrestlings to yours — you would not succeed in loosening in the least one of the ten thousand bonds which bind you to immortality. Think of this when you are asked, *Where do you expect to spend your eternity?*

How far in advance of you stands the gate of this everlasting? You can see it most plainly; perhaps twenty or thirty years away, perhaps one year. Sometimes it seems almost near enough to be touched. It would not be surprising should you find yourself passing under its mighty arch any day. Once passed there is no repassing. It is easy to enter, impossible to retreat. Of the millions who have crossed the threshhold not one has ever found his way back into time. Once within, such ponderous bolt falls into its socket,

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such mighty bars and chains clank promptly to their place, that no madness nor folly that listens to the sound is stark enough to think of a going out again. You are steadily being pushed forward to that inexorable gateway — your step never for one moment stops or slackens — on, rapidly on, straight as the most skillfully shot arrow to its mark, are you being pressed by some unseen power which overbears, as if they were so many nothings, all your efforts of resistance. Think of this when you are asked, *Where do you expect to spend your eternity?*

An eternity; an absolute eternity; an eternity that cannot by any means be blotted out, or even for one moment receded from; an eternity just at hand — where are you counting upon spending *this?* What we are expecting often goes far toward deciding what we shall have. To reckon on ease and success will sometimes insure them, and sometimes it will prevent them. For the seaman to expect fair weather sometimes amounts to a shipwreck, and then again it is the only thing that can keep him from going to the bottom. For the sick man to expect health is sometimes enough to cast off his sickness, and then again it plunges him into indiscretions which are sure death.

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There are several answers which you may be supposed to make. And, first, you may say that *you have no definite expectations on the subject.* You do not know what to think of your prospects. Allow me to ask whether this is a rational position. There are doubtless many cases in which it is wise for one to form no definite idea of what is going to happen to him; cases indeed in which such an idea would be impossible. But is yours such? Are there no means of telling to what place in eternity you are bound? Or, if there are, would the knowledge only distress you without at all altering your prospects? Far from it. It is easy for you, at least not impossible, to find out whether you are in the broad, or in the narrow way. And if you should find yourself on the worse path you have an opportunity, more or less choice, of exchanging it for the better. In such circumstances you *ought* to have definite expectations as to your condition in the next world. Suppose some dark night you were to set forth and travel with all your might without any care as to the direction of your steps. One meets you and inquires what point you are expecting to reach at last, whether the house of your friend where the marriage festival to which you have

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been invited is in progress, or the river's brink and a bed beneath the water. And you reply that you have no definite expectations as to the matter. Yet you have but to lift your eye to where the polar star glistens to know whither you are going — perhaps you have but to ask the questioner. Is such conduct reasonable, according to any rule of reason known to mortals? Would not your friend feel justified in seizing upon you as one quite bereft of reason, and putting you under bolt and guard? And yet this is just your conduct in religion. No idea what point in eternity you will reach, and yet traveling, traveling, with all your might, when, by a little care in looking and inquiring, you might come to the Father's house and the marriage supper of the Lamb, instead of dreadful billows of destruction!

But I may conceive of you as giving another answer. You may feel able to say, *I expect to spend my eternity in Heaven*. Not many can say this in full, firm tones. Not many can say it with sound warrant for their expectation. But if you can, you are to be congratulated. Happy the man, thrice happy, who reasonably expects to make home in Heaven through that absolute, inevitable, proximate, swift-coming eternity! Such

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a man has no occasion for the pity of his fellows, though he is poor and sick and quite outcast from the honors and friendships of men. He has what he would unwisely barter for all this world has to give. I congratulate you if this man is yourself — if, amid the general dearth of well-grounded confidence of a heavenly eternity, you can wisely give that grand answer I have supposed. But perhaps it is worth while to consider the fact that men do not always spend their eternity where they expect to. There is such a thing as an unfounded expectation. If you count on Heaven because you are an honest and friendly man, or because you are as good as others, or because you do about as well as you can, or because God is merciful and will make allowances for human frailties, or because you propose to repent and believe at some time or other before you die, then your expectation is unfounded; and, despite it, your long, long eternity will not be likely to get spent within the jeweled and golden walls of Heaven. Your very hopes will go to defeat themselves. No more unpromising candidate for Heaven can be found than the man who falsely flatters himself that he is on the way thither. Ask what your foundations are. Search

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beneath your goodly building and see that it does not rest on mere hay and stubble. Perhaps it stands on a good, solid basis — and, if so, your examination will only increase your comfort. If it is found a mere Guy Fawkes' house, standing on combustibles and kegs of powder, waiting to be blown on the morrow to the four winds — awake, bestir yourself, provide other foundation while you can. Put Jesus Christ under your building. Do it by the only levers mighty enough for that, the godly sorrow and the living faith. Then when the question comes to you, *Where do you expect to spend your eternity*, you will be authorized to answer with beaming face and assured tone, as if an angel had spoken to you, *I expect to spend it in Heaven.*

The question is capable of but one answer besides. I can imagine you as giving that; but I know that there is not one, the wide world over, who is ready to utter even to his own heart so dreadful an answer. Persons there have been who in anguish and dismay have come out with the declaration that the harvest is past and the summer ended and they are not saved — that they look forward to nothing less than spending their inevitable, absolute, near eternity in the world of

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woe. The time may come when you will feel driven to the same dreadful confession. But as yet it is plain from the very quietness with which you carry yourself that you are far enough from taking this gloomy view of your future. You cannot be counting on spending your immortality so dreadfully, and yet wear such a face and keep such an attitude as that. You are having no expectation at all in the matter, or you are flattering yourself that in some way or other you will manage to escape into eternal blessedness. May you be successful. May you never come to be another Altamont. Still beware. It is not an altogether needless caution when I say, See to it that you are not some day obliged to give the most fearful of answers to that great question which has now been so often repeated in your ears. The way on which you are going is just the way to bring you to such a result. You have but to keep on in the beaten track of the years that are gone, and you are sure to reach the time when you will see plentiful reason to consider yourself doomed and lost. Continue to hear the Gospel with half an ear, keep busy in scheming and getting only for this world, still quiet any stray apprehensions with some vague intention of ulti-

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mate repentance — and the thing is done. After a while you will suddenly become conscious of a new position in respect to the government of God. That government has all along been yoked to you, and essaying to drag you up the steep, slippery ascent toward God and salvation. You have resisted and are resisting. By and by you will have no occasion to do so. Of a sudden you will feel yourself cut loose. Every bond will be severed, and you will feel your feet beginning to slide. Then will flash upon you the full horror of your situation. And should some voice come to you and ask, *Where do you expect to spend your eternity?* you would be obliged to answer, *I expect to spend it in Hell.* God forbid such a necessity! Yourself forbid it! Let not this be the issue of all the sabbaths and Bibles and sermons and strivings of the Holy Ghost which are now yours.

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XXXI.

A SURE MADNESS.

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XXXI.

A SURE MADNESS.

A COMPLETE eternity belongs to only two independent objects. These objects are space and God. Without beginning in the past and without end in the future, these necessary existences are placed by this attribute at an infinite remove from all things else with which we are acquainted.

But there are many objects whose duration gives them a title to something of the grandeur which belongs to these two in their mysterious unapproachableness. In respect to an eternity past, God and space stand alone. In respect to an eternity to come, they have the world of mankind for their fellows. Every soul has had its day of birth but to not one will come its day of death.

Families will perish; parishes will pass without leaving a trace; states, however long they may continue, must at last come to nothing; the race as such will vanish in the fires of the judgment day; but the individual souls which make up

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these have nothing of their perishing character. With that same finger with which God has written *passing away* on almost all things we see around us, has He written on the immaterial principle within us, whether high or humble, reverenced or despised, holy or sinful, in characters easily read of all and preaching mightly to all, *abiding forever.*

We have heard this, and assented to it, a thousand times. But do we really understand what it is to live forever? We go to our dictionaries and read that, in the narrowest of its literal meanings, forever is duration without end. Is the matter now settled, and have our minds now taken in the full force of an endless existence? We go to our philosophies and are told that duration is an abstraction and an attribute, and we find its character discussed with great show of skill and science in a multitude of essays. Are we now at rest, and can it at last be said that we have fairly mastered the idea of a soul's life?

At Potsdam in Prussia lately lived a man who had nearly made out his century. How great the number of objects which had met his eye since he was carried in his mother's arms! Countless particulars in these familiar landscapes about his

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home! The trees, the stones, the animals, the blades of grass, the leaves, the atoms of dust — what multitudes! But he had not passed all his years in that one spot. Led by an insatiable curiosity, he shifted his horizon, year after year, from land to land; and not a country that he saw but was seen with devouring eyes. And he had been as great a thinker as observer. From early dawn till late at night, for most of his century, his mind had been always on the alert, investigating for himself and making the thoughts of others his own. What an immense variety of mental acts and state had been his during all these years!

Now suppose that the long life of this man were multiplied by all the objects he saw, and the product still further multiplied by all the mental acts which his vigorous and indefatigable powers put forth, would that give us anything like the number of the ages which the humblest of us is destined to live? If, instead of the life of Humboldt, we take that of a State, and multiply the two thousand years of the Roman empire by all the objects which from first to last the subjects of that empire saw, and the product still further by all the thoughts, purposes, and emotions which

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those many generations of subjects entertained, would that give us anything like the sum of the ages the humblest of us is destined to live? If we take the life of the race, instead of that of a nation, and multiply all the years from the creation to the judgment by all the objects which all the generations will have seen, and the product still further by all the acts and states which they have done and experienced, would that give us anything like the sum of the ages the humblest of us is destined to live? Not the millionth part of them. As yet we have made no progress whatever toward expressing the magnitude of our future.

Science has shown that a single grain of copper must contain at least ten millions of atoms. Still more wonderful, it shows that there are living beings so small that ten thousand millions of them would only make the bulk of a hemp seed. A mass of dust as large as one's hand probably contains particles enough to exhaust all the powers of a reckoning arithmetic. How many particles then must belong to the prodigious mass of the globe! Each of these mites has its history, as full of events as that of the most busy man ever known: for it is demonstrable that each is subject

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to an unceasing succession of changes, and has been ever since it came into being, some hundreds of thousands of years ago. Think how constantly the whole body of air is in motion — how constantly the whole body of water, through attractions and heat and winds. Think what a variety of motions is impressed on the whole globe as subject to astronomical laws, and what modifications these motions are continually having from chemical influences and the agency of living beings. What a constant rush of events is taking place in every animal and vegetable structure, with its circulations and growth and decay! How much history is included in a single drop of water swarming with a greater population of animalcules than the world has of human beings — how much is signified in the little chip of coral made up of the skeletons of more animals than we can reckon! Gigantic mountain ranges are chiefly made up of animalcules — how much history is signified by them! And so each atom of the enormous globe has its own unwritten biography, its own crowded succession of changes stretching back through many geological eras to that far off beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. How many globes just

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like this gleam upon it from the evening sky — many visible to the naked eye; hosts upon hosts, like the sands of the sea-shore, revealed by the telescope — each made up of as many infinitesimals as our own world, and each infinitesimal having as long and crowded a march of experiences as any mote of dust that we tread upon! And now suppose the life of this world till the last conflagration to be multiplied by all the atoms which compose it, and by all the events great and small which shall have taken place within it, and, still further, by all the atoms and all the events which belong to all the worlds whose light has reached us — would that give us anything like the number of the ages which the humblest of us is destined to live? Not the millionth part of them. As yet we have not begun the numeration which expresses the life of the soul.

By various means it is now possible to measure the hundredth part of a second of time. There are more than eight millions of these divisions in a single day. Take as many of these as are contained in the life of the eldest angel, and multiply the sum into itself as many times as there are angels in heaven and men on the earth and evil spirits in hell — as many times as there are iotas

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of existence and event within the entire range of modern astronomy — as many times as there could be figures of microscopic smallness crowding all the planetary and sidereal spaces as far as the most penetrating optic glass can carry us — and when you have found the mighty product, multiply it by the products we have already found and found to be insufficient; and then call each unit of that last product the longest period that creature-existence has yet reached, or will have reached ten thousand billions of ages hence — would that give us anything like the sum of the ages which the humblest of us is destined to live? Not the millionth part of them. When the last of all this prodigious accumulation of years has come there is yet an eternity to follow. The thought can dart away in an instant to the furthest star that has ever glimmered upon us. Were thought to travel along the line of that supplementary future with the same speed for all the years which we have just tried to heap up before your imagination, it would at last reach a point in our life most formidably remote indeed, but yet a point after which come mysterious lengths of being still to which belongs the name of eternity as truly as if our amazing subtractions had not

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been made. Such is a *glimpse* of the life of your soul and of mine.

The life of your body may become irksome to you through disappointment and various trouble. In such case it is in your power to bring that life to an end with great ease. By just opening a vein, or swallowing a drug, or discharging a pistol, you can in a few moments lay yourself out stark till the judgment. But there is no way in which you can in the least shorten that overpowering stretch of existence of which we have just been trying to get an idea. No poison, nor dagger, nor leaden hail can bring the soul to an end. Should by any chance the time come when existence proves a burden to you there is no possible way of ridding yourself of it — neither by stratagem, nor by bold violence, nor even by entreating God, who indeed has the power to speak it into annihilation, but who will never use the power. He will hold you to life with an unrelaxing grasp, though you shrink against it, though you loathe it, though you beg by all Heaven and earth to be freed from the intolerable calamity. This He has taken care to let you well know. You know it so well that no extremity of distress would be likely to suggest to you the idea of *trying* to bring about your own extinction.

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And so, when you have done all you can to take in the thought of your great future, and are almost overborne by a glimpse of the swarming hosts of ages, you find yourself oppressed still further by the conviction that, do what you will, not a single moment can be subtracted from your incalculable eternity.

The first few years of our immortality are of a mixed character in respect to happiness. Every one has some joys and some sorrows. The happiest is not perfectly happy — the wretchedest is not perfectly wretched. But this state of things is not to go with us very far into our long succession of years. In a few days our sorrows will all vanish to return no more, or our happiness will. In a few days we shall have all the enjoyment our capacities admit of, or all the misery. And there will be no further change. Down through the reaches of that long drawn pilgrimage which our souls must needs make it will all be bright as paradise, or dark as the valley of the shadow of death. This twofold character of our pilgrimage is just as unalterable as its length. It were as vain to think of drinking forever that mingled cup which is now held to our lips as it would be to think of blotting out our forever by our cries and efforts.

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One or the other, joy unqualified and supreme, or wretchedness unqualified and supreme — such are the only alternatives which are allowed to give complexion to our immortality, and whichever it is that first gets the mastery will keep it ever after. Once fairly entered on the better path, it is henceforth one continued and invincible triumph. Once fairly entered on the other, it is henceforth one continued and invincible disaster going on eternally toward midnight.

Human nature finds it very hard to bear long pain even in its lowest degrees. How slowly does a single restless night creep away! It is perhaps but an uneasiness of body or mind barely sufficient to keep you awake; and you lie and listen to the ticking of the clock, and wish it were morning, and think how wearily long it is in coming. If it is some sharp pain that preys upon you, your impatience is still greater, and it seems as though the minutes were hours, and in their intolerable sluggishness would never give you the morning light by which to go to the dentist or to send for the physician. Let that short night of eight or ten hours become the long night of polar regions. Be you condemned to lie in your restlessness or your pain till the six months' darkness wears

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away before can open to you any prospect of relief. How wretchedly tedious would seem that long time of waiting! The lingering minutes, how irksome would they become to you! Would it not be almost beyond your power of endurance to lie in your weary pain, and count the moments, as they slowly approach and slowly depart, and think how many such must be worn away before the dawn will allow the least thing to be done for you! How then could you bear to have that same state of things drawn out through a night of fifty years, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, ten millions, as many millions as there are sands on the sea-shores and atoms in the universe! To look forward to the continuance of even the smaller degrees of pain through such tremendous periods — to feel absolutely sure that not the slightest relief can be had until the very last moment of these periods has fully gone — what must it be to our poor, impatient human nature! Even with the hope of an ending at last — how dreadful! But take away that hope, give the most thorough conviction that in no secondary sense, but in all soberness and strictness of speech, that long trouble will see no end — can human nature bear this! And, after all, this is

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not stating the case in its full force. The true question is not, how are we fitted to bear a small pain through duration without end? The question which our circumstances really bid us answer is this, how can such beings as we who in one short restless night exclaim, "Would to God it were morning," how can such beings bear supreme misery without hope? Can your heart endure or your hands be strong in the day when God shall begin to deal with you in this manner?

This far-stretching forever, in the traveling over of a small part of which we so weary our imaginations — this far-stretching forever which no man can avoid let him do what he will — this far-stretching forever which must be either supremely happy or supremely miserable — this far-stretching forever whose ruin our poor, impatient human nature is so ill able to bear — is what most men voluntarily incur the risk of ruining completely every day in their lives. They admit their immortality. They cannot but feel that there is, at least, a possibility that the neglecters of religion in this world will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power. They cannot but feel it possible that their all of this world may forsake them

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at any moment. And yet these are the men who are making daily postponement of religion with as much coolness as if they were venturing absolutely nothing. To be sure, if they make the enormous venture for the sake of an enormous equivalent, their conduct ought not to surprise us. Men are wont to risk much for the sake of gaining much. But where is the thing which a reasonable being can for a moment dream will compensate him for the risk of undoing his immortality? *What* is the thing for which this risk is actually taken? Oh tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, for what an almost incredible trifle men are willing to put at stake their everlasting all! It is not perfect happiness in this world — not nearly as much, though even that would be a strange pay for so vast a stake. It is not perfect happiness for a single year — not even a greater degree of enjoyment in this life than falls to the lot of the Christian. It is merely a few days, more or less, of conscience-disturbed, God-chastised, miserable, indulgence in sin. This is the whole of it: this is what Satan puts down, and what men accept, as an offset to their eternity in that great game of hazard which they and he are playing together — that game in which he risks nothing and they everything.

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The Scripture says that madness is in the heart of men while they live. It does not take an inspired person to say this. The impenitent can do it for themselves. None know better than they, not only that sound judgment does not justify them in the course they are taking, but also that it exclaims against that course as the hight of folly and madness. At the bottom of their hearts they are amazed at themselves to think that they can so coolly take such risks for such pittance of a consideration. They know there never was such another setting at defiance the commonest principles of prudence and reason. And yet, despite this knowledge, they persist in repeating day after day what they so severely judge. Just think of it — that inevitable existence through which the fleetest thought of angel could not travel during as many angelic lives past as there are atoms and events belonging to the universe — this mighty All of theirs is voluntarily hazarded upon the cast of a die, not once, nor twice, but almost times without number — and all this, while a voice in their souls is continually echoing the Scripture which says, Madness is in their heart while they live!

Most certainly what I have now said was not

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meant to bear on one across the seas. It is meant for *you*. I do not imagine that you feel as though injustice were done you in this. None can know better than you, in your moments of reflection, that the real name of that course of conduct you are pursuing is *madness*. Your conscience has told you this, hundreds of times. You have no manner of doubt that, were you once entered upon an undone forever, you would accuse all your postponements and indifferences in regard to religion by as severe a name as does the wise man of the Ecclesiastes. Confident then of being sustained by the verdict of your own convictions, I make no hesitation in saying that, in trifling as you do with the interests of that wonderful forever which belongs to you, and of which you cannot divest yourselves, do what you will, you are committing the greatest *madness* that was ever known within the wide monarchy of God. You are having many associates in this responsible insanity, but what comfort will that afford you when your probation is all gone, when your soul has been required of you, and when with unspeakable misery in your heart you begin to count up the intolerably creeping years of an existence without end! Suppose that, in the dead of the night just at

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hand, you should be suddenly awaked, as many have been, by the death pang, and after a few spasms find yourself fully entered on an undone eternity. How your soul would cry out against itself! I could not if I would, and I would not if I could, fully paint the intensity of that despair and woe which would seize you on your awaking to the fact that the great and unalterable eternity of which you have been so often warned is at last upon you. May God in His mercy save you from such an experience! Endeavor to realize now, as far as you can, what it must be to feel your way inch by inch through the sin and suffering of a known forever.

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XXXII.

A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL.

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XXXII.

A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL.

AN eastern marriage festival. What vast outlay for enjoyment! The richest viands, the sweetest music, the brightest illuminations, the most brilliant decorations of person and dwelling which the splendid circumstances of the parties allow! They are of royal rank. They have pro vided a scene of almost fairy splendor. Most fortunate is he who gains admission to the palace at this time of abounding gorgeousness and luxury.

See a faint image of the heavenly state. It is chief of royal festivals. It is joy and glory without measure. When we think of the fruit of the tree of life; of that array of linen clean and white; of that new song; of that angelic society; of that city whose walls are gems, whose streets are gold, and whose sun is God, how can we help saying, Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb!

And all men are called. That one man is rich

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and another poor makes no difference. That one man has good blood in his veins and another base, even that one has a very excellent natural character and another a very bad one, makes no difference. The five foolish virgins are called to the marriage. And the messenger as he goes his round is not one whit less full-toned and cordial as he speaks to them than he is to the five virgins who are wise.

But it is not enough to have a call to heavenly glory and happiness. All the virgins were called to the banqueting hall, but only five actually entered it. They that were *ready* went in to the marriage. So, in order to enter Heaven, a certain preparation is needed beyond having an invitation to it lying on our mantels or spoken in our ears. The invitation must be accepted. A wedding garment must be taken. There must be a repenting and believing. On this point God is inexorable. He will not allow us to tear apart the invitation and its conditions. As well might we hope to detach from its primary the gravitating satellite. No one will ever be seen at the marriage supper of the Lamb who has not in some way come into possession of oil in his vessel.

But how shall this oil be had? Will it do to

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go to sleep trusting that when we wake at the cry, Behold the bridegroom cometh, we shall find our vessels full through the pity of some kind unknown friends? Will mere wishing for oil, however earnest and long continued, bring it to us? Can we depend on the store our friends may have? By no means — we must go and buy for ourselves. We must be *personally active* in getting that preparation for Heaven without which it cannot be entered. The case is very like that of a farmer. A certain state of his fields is necessary to his having crops; and a certain working on his part just as necessary to his fields having that state. If the soil is good and free from stones, if the tools he uses are in good condition, if he sets about his business when the ground is soft with the moisture of spring and the high-riding summer suns have not reached him with their parching and debilitating heats, he may expect a much easier task than would have fallen to him had he begun later, with poor tools, and on thin and stubborn land. But, under the best of circumstances, there is labor before him in the breaking up of his fallow, in the planting of his seed, in the hoeing and weeding of the rising plants, and finally in the gathering them into granaries. He

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does not expect to escape labor. Will God's bright suns and precious showers of themselves fill his barns? Can he count on some kind genii to do his tillage for him? He feels that he must "go forth to his work and to his labor till the evening." Under a like necessity are you, if you would reap Heaven at last. Let it not be said that this is taking conversion out of the hands of God, and putting it entirely in the hands of man. To say that you must strive to enter in at the Strait Gate is not saying that there is no need of a co-striving of God. Both strivings are necessary. The farmer must labor, but in addition the sun must shine and rain fall in due proportion. It will not do to overlook either condition of success. While insisting on regeneration by the Holy Spirit, we must also insist that you "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." I do insist upon it. If you have any desire to be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb, remember that you must actively engage in procuring the indispensable oil.

In preparing for this great festival it is necessary to be active *before a certain time.* The five foolish virgins at last set themselves to make ready; but they might have spared themselves

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the labor. Before it was done the door was shut. Then the loiterers came up and knocked. They tried to open the door by pressing entreaties. In vain. Too late — just a little too late. Now, it does not lie within my power to tell you just where that fatal point lies beyond which it will do no good to exert yourself with a view to gain admission into Heaven. All I can say is, that there *is* such a point, and that it is never more distant than death and may be much nearer. Up to this, activity on your part may, through Divine grace, do wonders. It may not only take you within the banqueting house of the skies, but place you in one of its most honorable seats. What think you of a throne scarcely inferior to those of archangels and apostles? This may be yours as the result of timely exertion. But there is a shutting of the door — a bolting and barring of it — which no created arm can successfully contend against. What if you run with all speed to buy oil of grace after that! What if the world never saw such another specimen of diligence and zeal and labor in trying to get ready for the high festival of eternity! What if your prayers come knocking with the frequency and loudness of importunate terror! "Lord, Lord, open unto me! It is true I have

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been slow. I have slept when I should have waked, I have been wrapped up in the world when I should have given my best attention to religion. But it shall be so no longer. I am now all alive to the great matter of salvation: there is nothing I will not do to obtain it. Lord, Lord, open unto me — Lord, Lord, open unto me! What a calamity should this door remain shut upon me forever! Oh, let it open but for one brief moment only — one brief moment! Give me but one chance more. Lord, Lord, open unto me." But it is too late. Never being so merciful as God in the time of mercy, never being more tenacious of wrath in the day of wrath. The closed door will never open. Your labors will all come to nothing; like those of the farmer who begins to bestir himself to prepare his field for a crop just when the winter blasts begin to blow, after having wasted spring and autumn in idleness. He may tell Providence of his empty storehouse. He may beg earnestly for the bright warm days he knew months gone. He may dig away at the frozen ground with amazing pains, and deposit his seed. But what of that? Will the laws of Nature give way that he may escape the consequences due to his folly? The frosts and snows — will they give

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up their reign that he may redeem his position! Never a single blade will reward his toil. The bitter blasts which rave around his want and wretchedness will laugh his unreasonable industry to scorn. Who does not know that winter is no time to begin farming? Further than this, who does not know that if one begins after a certain point in the spring even, it is uncertain whether a crop can be matured ere the frosts set in; and that, from this point onward through summer and autumn, the uncertainty is ever deepening into the probability and certainty of a miserable failure? In December, are you not quite sure that it is altogether too late to set about preparing for any crop whatever? Even so be you sure that there is not only a bleak wintry time of the soul during which there can be no successful sowing unto everlasting life, but that also, from the spring of life onward, it is ever growing more and more uncertain whether the point is not already passed beyond which there can be no maturing of the started grain of the kingdom.

We may conceive of such a thing as this critical point in human life being to us a matter of merely speculative interest. It would be so could we be sure that, in fact, no one would be *suffered*

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to reach the crisis without having his provision for eternity completed. Does God always interfere for this purpose? Are none actually found bestirring themselves too late? What numbers have thought of themselves you know. You have read of men of the highest intelligence bewailing their harvest as past, their summer as ended; and whom no persuasion could convince to the contrary. Do you not see multitudes dropping quite into the grave without the least sign of an amended character? What means the Master when He says, "For many I say unto you shall seek to enter in and shall not be able. When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord open unto us,' and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." What means the Master when He says: "I go my way and ye shall seek me and shall die in your sins: whither I go ye cannot come?" Therefore be assured that five virgins will go to buy so late as to fail of their ob-

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ject. A door shut upon loiterers is not a supposed thing merely, but one that actually happens. People bestirring themselves for Heaven to no purpose, because bestirring themselves too late, are a frightful reality. The farmer not only may put off his labors so long as to miss the crop, the seaman not only may neglect the condition and course of his ship so long as to make reaching of the haven impossible, the trader not only may neglect his shop so long as to make bankruptcy inevitable, but he *does* do it. And so the sinner not only may put off attention to religion till all exertion is defied by a shut door, but he *does* do it. We have no reason to think that cases of this kind are all far away in the times of Christ: they are here in these days and lands. Your own eyes have probably fallen on some on whose fates seals have been placed — who if they should call would receive no answer, and if they should seek early would not find.

If that veil which so easily wraps the secrets of Providence away from us were withdrawn should I find the door shut on *you?* With all my heart I hope not. The idea is too painful to be entertained. I choose rather to assume that it is still an open question whether you will at last en-

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ter through the gates into the City. But I cannot shut my eyes on the fact that it will not always be so; and I have asked myself whether you will probably be found at last coming up to a shut door. I have answered the question. And now I propose it for you to answer. Most certainly you do not intend a fatal delay. On the contrary, you propose to place a safe interval between your going to purchase the needful oil and the terrors of that shut door which will never open. Still, observation and experience show that intention and execution cannot be taken as being practically the same thing. In religious matters to break a resolution is more common than to keep it. Look at what generally happens to others in circumstances like your own, at what your own course has been thus far, at the tremendous influence of habit on human nature — and then tremble. There is occasion for it. "As thy soul liveth there is but a step between thee and death." You are hurrying toward the fatal bourne swift as an eagle. Let your imagination outstrip your flying footsteps, and bring back to you a picture of what your feelings will be when, at last, you wake up to a full impression of the fact that your probation is all behind you. Can you look

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that picture steadily in the face? Does it not almost make you leap with unutterable horror? "Probation really all gone, not one shred left? Never the slenderest chance more? Prayers nothing, effort nothing, the entreaties and strength of all created beings, if they could be enlisted in my behalf, nothing? Alas! What madness has possessed me! How freely would I give all the stars of heaven, if they were mine, for a single hour with an open door! Alas, alas, alas!" It is better to imagine all this beforehand and take warning, than it is to make yourself easy and at last experience it. Will you continue the risk of having this woful condition become your own? Or, are you ready to decide that *not another moment* shall separate between you and the beginning of a thorough preparation for the kingdom of God?

I listen. Methinks I hear the noise of bars being taken down, and of bolts being drawn back. I look, and lo — the gates of the soul open, open widely, open till each strikes the wall on either hand. And from within a voice, in which is the sound of tears, says, "I resist no more. I have been infatuated — well-nigh lost. Come in, Thou Blessed. Come in to dwell and reign. Cast out

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Thine enemies and mine. Sweep and garnish all. Make all things new. I give up my sins. I renounce them, one and all, forever. Pardon them for Thy *blood's* sake. Henceforth, I will serve Thee outwardly and inwardly. I submit to be what Thou wouldst have me be, and to do what Thou wouldst have me do. I put myself and mine altogether in Thy hands. Let the King come in to His own!"

Will He come? I look through the broad, free, gateway and lo, He is already there! Hanging on the Cross, His feet embraced by the kneeling will and heart, His glorious face beaming Divine pity and forgiveness into the wet eyes that look up trustingly into His, and which, as they look, see a rainbow through every tear that falls from them! The man, long refusing, long hesitating, has at last come to the Cross — or, if you please, the Cross has come to him. He has escaped the shut door by passing through another. He is within the Strait Gate.

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XXXIII.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKSGIVINGS.

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XXXIII.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKSGIVINGS.

THE ancients sought painfully to find out some way of changing baser substances into gold: sometimes fancied themselves on the eve of that great discovery.

Suppose one had actually made it. How he would have rejoiced! How he would have congratulated himself! How his friends would have overwhelmed him with their congratulations!

"Fortunate man! What a beautiful thing gold is! How fair and shining in the coin, in the setting of the gem, in the yellow goblet and crown and scepter! It is food of every name, from the Arctics to the Equator. It is honey from Hymettus; rosy wine from Chios and Falerne. It is raiment of all rich stuffs, fit for nobles and princes, from Lyons, from Persia, from Cashmere, from Ind. Do you not see — it is *power* in the form that sustains armies, drives engines, sways the labors of men, builds up great stations, under the

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name of influence softly and yet most mightily bends to our purposes the minds of neighbors and acquaintances in social life. Do you not see — it is temples for religion, alms for the needy, homes and fields and mansions in city and country; honor and repose and pleasure; even titles and baronies and crowns, if you choose to have them. Having now the skill to make at pleasure this famous metal out of the common things under your feet, what a monarch you are! Is not such a feat worth years of toil and sweat in the laboratory? What a triumph to have unlocked such a secret — a secret that has baffled so many great sages, and even Hermes Trismegistus himself! See what mountain heaps of poor base matter are lying about you, spurned by the foot in their worthlessness — nothing is wanting but the touch of your philosopher's stone to make these dull masses shine like the rising day and set you mightier than a king. We congratulate you. You are forever beyond the reach of a poor, straitened, cramped, worried life. Having unlocked the gate of this stubborn mystery that has so long parted the vile from the precious, lo, you can now live gorgeously and famously beyond all your contemporaries."

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So say his congratulating friends to the successful alchemist. And, after the same manner say I to you, O Christian convert, who have found out the way of changing the base metal of your natural character into the gold of a penitent, believing, and Christian heart. Only, as I grasp your hand and look cordially into your eyes in which a new light is shining, I cannot consent to congratulate you in such poor and measured words as come from the friends of the successful alchemist.

Congratulate you! my dear sir, *all Heaven* is at this moment pealing with congratulations. That Christian character you have come to — ah, here is something that deserves to be called gold. It shines with a fairer and purer ray than ever shot forth from Ophir, or from the queenliest star that leads off the bannered hosts of night. It is to the soul what food and raiment and vital forces are to the body. It is favor and fame with God; riches and glory eternal; riches and glory without on its way, and present riches and glory within.

A coarse instinct of compassion and love of repute (sometimes miscalled philanthropy), in variable mixture, is enough to do, and in fact has

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done in all ages, a certain part of the world's outward mercies and charities; but it is much the smaller part. Such philanthropy is nothing but a bubble, a painted bubble, a little thicker-sided, perhaps, than some bubbles, but which immediately bursts when any considerable weight is laid on it. A converted man is the main dependence of the poor and the stricken. His new heart is a thorough solid, able to bear on occasion an almost unlimited weight of alms-giving and helpful work. He will help friends, and he will help enemies. He will do for those who are beautifully grateful, and he will do for the ungrateful. He will do for the amiable, and he will go on to do for them when they become unamiable and inflictors of wrong. And, Christian convert, I congratulate both you and all about you — family, parish, State, Country, and all to the world's end — on your having come into possession of a principle that, like a star, small or great, smiles toward all points of the compass, and sends out in endless succession its circular ripples of light that never stop. It is sure to make you a public benefit, society's benefactor, a shining helper of mankind. It will keep the second table of the law for you as no sham philanthropy can do.

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And, too, it is as good at the keeping of the first table as it is at that of the second. Your sacred toil (which in some respects is so like that of the alchemist) having at last found its way from the base metal of the natural character into the sterling gold of the Christian, you will at once find that gold, in obedience to its own law of crystallization, expanding into a temple for the honor of God, furnished with altars and censers and robed priest (and his form is like that of the Son of God), and its daily sacrifice streaming away toward Heaven in sweet-breathed clouds. Nothing so honors and praises God in the face of His universe as a thoroughly Christian character and life. It is better and more musical than Te Deums grandly surging from the orchestras of renowned cathedrals. The sonorous joy that pants Heavenward in words, among their groined and pillared roofs, is far less sweet and honoring to God than those silent anthems that go up to Him from any plain and humble man who has within him a new-born soul. O soul, transmuted from base aversion and disobedience to God to precious love and obedience to Him, so that He is now your Father — who is to be congratulated, and congratulated again, with eye that glows and hand

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that warmly presses, if not you? Philanthropy is good; piety is better; most fortunate are you in having come into possession of both these treasures, which in the sight of God are the pearl of great price.

Who does not need the quiet comfort of a settled and orderly habitation which he can call his own — a castle of security, independence, shelter, and repose? What such a dwelling is to the outward man, such is a Christian character to the man within. It shelters him perfectly, as to all his best interests, from all storms of this world and of the next. It is satisfaction; it is rest from worry of conscience and carnal fears and battles; it is fellowship of the choicest kind with kindred and loving spirits whose names are Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and general assembly and church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven —in short it is *home*. And because you, my friend, have gained this rich home for yourself let me warmly congratulate you. Your present and your future are made. In your glorious castle of security, shelter, and repose make yourself at home for time and for eternity. It is full of the kindly restful home atmosphere. It is under your feet and you cannot fall. It is around you, and earth's

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mortal evils dare not, and cannot, break through its thick, buttressed walls to destroy you. It is over you, beamed and ceiled in many a ponderous arch and rib and tile of adamant against the rattling angers of the heavens, so that they cannot enter to pierce or crush you. And this royal home is *yours*. You cannot be cast out of it at the will of another. It is yours to have and to hold. It is yours to dwell in, to improve, to rejoice in forever. The man who can take up his abode in such promises as these, "All things are yours," "All things work together for good to them that love God," is so richly provided for that he needs no other inheritance. Feel you richer than a monarch, O citizen of glorious Religion and the Life Eternal? You should. And you *will*. Your alchemy is a success. You have the true philosopher's stone. And, busying yourself still in your best and noblest of arts, till the dull dust and dross of your native character have all become gold, and expanded into, not only a shining temple for the honor of God and a shining asylum for afflicted men, but also into a shining palace-home for yourself, you will fill it forever with the glorious music of your own congratulations. Happy man! I press your hand with my whole

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heart. I look rejoicing welcomes and well-dones into those eyes of yours in which I see a new light shining fairer than the loveliest dawn — the light of Christian penitence and faith. Be willing to exchange lots with none save the angels of Heaven. You are on the way to the angels. How congratulations are showered on the warrior who has come back conqueror from the stricken field! Ah, what congratulations and felicitations will the thronging angels rain on you — as an entrance is ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and you sit down with Him on His throne, who also overcame and is set down with the Father on His throne!

But I have more to say to you than these honest words of congratulation. I say also, let us devoutly *thank and praise God* through whose mighty working alone your spiritual alchemy has proved a success.

Before men began to question how stones might be turned into gold, and had set themselves to vex and torture matter in their crucibles, many great thinkers puzzled over the higher question of how to regenerate human character. They pored over it day and night. They handed it down from

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father to son, from teacher to disciple. Socrates wrestled with it, and passed it on to the Platos: the Platos did what they thought their best, and passed it on to the Ciceros and Senecas. While some men, hid in caves and castle-cells, mid retorts and crucibles and midnight flames and explosions, frayed all the country side and earned the names of wizards and magicians in the effort to regenerate a handful of dull dust into as much shining gold, other men were earning the names of philosophers (perhaps of enthusiasts and fools) by sitting, pen in hand and wrinkle on brow, thinking, *thinking*, till corpse-pale, how to regenerate society.

Some say that all this study was in vain; as vain as that of the old alchemists who, for the toil of years, got nothing as the result. It may be so. Self-trusting toil, however great, may well fail to reach the secret of God. But this secret has at last been found out. A sure way of revolutionizing human character is now public property. It was not found out by thinking — it was sent to us by revelation. It is not an ingenious contrivance of men — it is an outcome of the wisdom and power of God. Alchemists had their methods; but never a method that succeeded in turning

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stones into yellow ingots. They never turned stones into ingots *without* a method. Opposed by laws of Nature; opposed, as they said, by spirits malicious; they never did and never could succeed. But there have been many who, against all and a thousand oppositions and inertias, have succeeded in becoming new creatures in Christ Jesus by a certain method which can be told to others. And this method — ah, my friend, freshly born again, neither you nor I need be told that it is full of the *power of God*, as well as full of human activity. The Cross you grasp, God set it up. The highway of repentance and faith by which you have come to that Cross, God planned and built it as truly as ever did engineer his railroad. You came on it, and have traveled its whole length, under constant pressure from Him. When you came to the Cross's foot, and embraced it, and looked up trustingly and lovingly into the face of Jesus, it was because God had worked in you to will and to do. It was because you had been born again of the Holy Ghost. You turned, you walked, you ran, you laid hold of the Lamb slain; but a Divine force was at the bottom of all your turning and walking and running and clinging. Your efforts would have been as vain as

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were those of the old alchemists if you, like them, had found nothing but your own efforts to depend on. In vain roared their furnaces, in vain bubbled and hissed retort and crucible, in vain poured out smoke and incantation on the midnight air. Their sweat and grimed hands and vigils, and even magics, all came to nothing. Not a yellow atom could they get. So it would have been with your efforts for a justifying faith and a new character, had not a power come to your aid greater than your own, or than that of any created spirit. At every point your activities stood upon, took hold of, and were empowered by, the activities of God. Your faith was His gift. He has given you repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. He has given you power to become a son of God. You have been born of the Spirit. You have had the renewing of the Holy Ghost. God has created in you a clean heart and renewed a right spirit within you. You could not have come to Jesus except the Father had drawn you. So that you did not misrepresent the facts to yourself when, just before you reached the Cross, and almost in despair of ever reaching it, you lifted your eyes to the hills whence cometh help and cried, Lord, save or I perish. Then was stretched out

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the helping hand to keep you from sinking. The Spirit was poured out from on high; and so the wilderness has become a fruitful field, and the desert a garden of the Lord.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," saith the Lord. So be thankful to God. Thank Him who has made your great alchemy successful. Bless him for the pure gold to which at last you have come, and which you would not exchange even for possession of the famous secret of the Middle Ages. Why, those old alchemists would not only have leaped for joy had some friend brought them the philosopher's stone, but, if I am not much mistaken, they would have expressed their gratitude to him in most glowing terms. Go you and do likewise. Never before did the hand of benefactor do such service as has been done to you. Think of it. Think of the portion you have, and of the portion to which you are going. Down on your knees straightway, I charge you, and speak out glowing thanksgiving toward the smiling and helping Heaven. You have already done it, no doubt. But do it again. Do it always. You cannot be too thankful. Possessor of so much; heir to so much, O regenerated and redeemed child of God, who shall be grateful

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if not you? Then sing to God. Sing loudly. Sing with all the orchestras of your soul. Nay, let the singing be congregational; and let *all* that is within you praise and bless His holy name. Crowd all your heart with light and music, as some palace is crowded on high-festival, and then open all the windows heavenward that the song and the splendor may stream up to God. *Te Deum Laudamus* — how natural it is for incense and flame to go toward the sky! Standing on the shore of the Red Sea which you have just crossed, and where your enemies lie overwhelmed, take up the song of Miriam, and say with triumphing trumpets and cymbals, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation."

Among us Nature has an annual death and resurrection. Winter is death — Spring is life. Winter is barrenness and desolation: and, on every hand, the bare trees moan over the fallen leaves, and dry grasses, and brown fields, from which all life seems forever gone. But with spring comes a resurrection. Out of the ruins of the old year, springs up a new verdure made up in part of the ashes of the old. The bare, dry

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meadows are again green and dewy. The naked shrubs and trees again put forth leaves and blossoms. The dead song of birds, the dead hum and chirping of insects, again break into music. There is quickening, and leaping, and singing in the glow of the sunbeam and in the breath of the zephyr. Nature is alive again. One would hardly know the landscape of January in this landscape of May.

If one says that this spring-resurrection is not a very lovely and desirable thing, I contradict him in the name of human nature. If one says that this wonderful transformation comes of mere natural law — mere chemistry and electricity and vegetable mechanics — and that there is no God at the bottom of the steps by which the dead winter comes to be the living and lovely spring, I contradict him in the name of all devout hearts, and of Holy Scripture. If one goes to the other extreme and says that God does all, and Nature nothing; that there are no secondary causes concerned in the change, and, particularly, that *man* cannot help or hinder, or even quite prevent, so far as himself is concerned, the new and glorious spring-life, I contradict him in the name of science and general observation. It is true that God is

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at the heart of the whole thing. Without His primary touch and impulse, without His marshalings and inspirations and vitalizing forces, not a dry plant would burst into leaf and bloom. But the First Cause has taken second causes into partnership with Himself in repainting and requickening the wintry and dead earth. And, in particular, He has put it in the power of every man to do something to help or hinder this annual resurrection. Within certain limits, each settles for himself how early, and how much, loveliness the spring will bring to his gardens and fields. The protecting fences, the sloping glass, the bountiful fertilizers, the mingled taste and industry and money, can, on his own grounds, both hasten and greatly highten the beauty of the vernal season. And, if he chooses, he can, within his own fields, mar and prevent that beauty to almost any extent. He can so treat his trees and pastures that no spring will ever quicken them. With help of axe and fire and sand and salt, he can spread about himself a black desert in the best of May — quite as black and cheerless as lies about him in the worst of frozen January. So let him rejoice and be congratulated, not only on account of the blessed spring, but also on account of

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the good sense and industry and energy he has shown in promoting it instead of hindering. At the same time let him look thankfully up to that God without whose vital forces throbbing everywhere under and in the pulse of Nature, a life within a life, the power of a power, that Nature would have stayed eternally dead. O gracious convert, just now dead in trespasses and sins, this green and glorious spring coming out of the bosom of the dead winter, and on account of which you are to be both congratulated and thankful to God, is *yourself!*

It is in some city. All the long night pealed the bells and thundered the engines. And, now that morning has come, we will go forth and see what has happened. Lo, acres on acres of black and smoking rubbish! Not a house left standing in the whole wide district; not a fence, not a shrub, not a person, save here and there an inquisitive visitor like ourselves. Ashes, broken walls, bricks and stones grimed and blasted with heat, charred timbers fallen hither and thither in wildest confusion, fragments of vessels and furniture in battered and blackened heaps — alas, and here is the charred body of a human being! Sad scene enough, a scene to sigh over! And yet,

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ere many days have passed, this dead district will show signs of resurrection ; in a few months there will be a great change ; in a year's time the resurrection will be almost complete, and a dense array of finished and peopled houses, warehouses, and exchanges will lift their granite and marble fronts on the delighted eye. Hardly a trace of the conflagration and its ruin. Everything better than before — larger, stronger, fairer. The dead city is living again.

Or, it is a battle-plain. From morning's gray streak till an hour ago, two hosts wrestled here for empire. The tug is over, and now see what a field it is ! Crops trampled into the earth ; the whole surface cut and torn into a bloody mire by the plunging shot, by the wheels of artillery, and by the struggling feet of men and horses ; pools of blood ; dead horses and men and war-weapons, entire and in fragments, lying about everywhere in utter disorder ; trees and buildings riddled and splintered and prostrated by the tornados of iron and lead that drove to and fro among them so many hours ; silent, ghastly faces staring blindly at the sky ; a sea-murmur of moans mixed with piercing cries rising piteously from the whole wide field — what a hideous *death-*

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scene! Such was the scene at the Waterloo of June, 1815. But the Waterloo of June, 1875, is a very different matter. To-day, Belgium has no greener and thriftier domain. The scars of that old contest have, one by one, disappeared; and a richer beauty and fruitfulness stand waving their banners of green and gold in the breezes of Brabant in consequence of that harvest of death, some sixty years ago. The death has become a rich resurrection.

If one denies that this resurrection from the ruins of battle, or that resurrection from the ruins of conflagration, is beautiful and desirable, I contradict him in the name of universal human nature and common sense. It is a thing to be rejoiced in and congratulated on. We grasp your hands and congratulate you honestly and heartily, O Citizens and Brabanters, over the regeneration of city and country. If one says that there is no finger of *God* in either — that cities burn and are rebuilt, that provinces are wasted by war and restored by peace, without any Divine Providence and forces being concerned — it being all a scene of mere natural law, with man for the prime agent — I contradict, in the name of all devout hearts and of both natural and revealed religion. And

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if any choose to go to the other extreme, and see nothing but the Supernatural in such events, and, instead of saying that it is all man, say that it is all God, and that men and other things are mere forms and puppets in His hands, mere earthen receptacles and conduits of His almighty forces, I contradict that also in the united name of observation and Holy Scripture. Men were consciously free in rebuilding the city, and might at any time have marred or altogether prevented its resurrection out of its ashes. Men have freely cultured and improved the plain of Waterloo; and, had they so chosen, they might have kept it as desolate as the famous battle left it. They might have sown it with salt. They might have made it a Tophet for all things refuse and offensive. But, instead of this, they have raised the district to a richer life than ever, by patient and skillful labor underlaid by the blessing and help of Almighty God. So let them greatly rejoice. Let them exchange congratulations, not only on account of the wonderful change for the better in their circumstances, but also on account of the free putting forth of their own strength and skill in that change. At the same time let them not fail to look significantly upward, and even say

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loud thanks to Him whose providence is universal, and who directs the steps of man, however much he may devise his own way. O gracious convert, just now a scene of ruins, this reconstructed city and this rich Belgic plain once heaped with death, on account of which men are to be both congratulated and thankful to God, is *yourself.*

Some weeks ago you saw a sick man; and a more weak, wasted, pained, and shattered body you never saw. His powers of body and mind had nearly all left him. Voices and steps had to be muffled in his presence. His breath and pulse fluttered on the borders of nothing. He was a sad wreck to see — if he could be said to be seen in that darkened room into which must be allowed to sift only here and there a ray of the golden day. But, to-day, as you walk abroad, you see him again. Can it be the same man? You can scarcely believe it till you look at him more narrowly. Yes, it is he; but what a surprising change! He is another man, as well as the same. Health and vigor gaze out boldly on you from eye and cheek and every rounded muscle. What weights he carries! How easily he wields the ponderous tools of his farm! the live-long day of

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summer labor shall scarcely send him home wearied. That ruddy cheek, that muscular arm, that stately trunk, that vigorous thought, are mere resurrections from the paleness, and weakness, and wastedness of the sick-room you visited some weeks ago.

And very goodly and fair and joyful resurrections they are — who doubts it? Let the man be joyful over them; and all his joyful friends offer him their heartfelt congratulations, as they gaze on his new life. If one says that this new life is due merely to the restoring powers of Nature, the physician, the medicine, and the nursing — that the hand of God was not at all concerned in that remarkable resurrection, so that the Christian wife who prayed for it early and late lost her labor, as did also the Christian church whose prayers, sabbath after sabbath, were asked and given in his behalf, I deny it in the name of piety and Scripture. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction." If one goes to the other extreme, and says that in that delightful recovery God did everything and man and Nature nothing, that the result would have been just the same had the natural surroundings been opposite in every

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particular, I deny it in the name of observation and a true philosophy. The First Cause wrought, and so did second causes also. He took man and other parts of Nature into sacred alliance with Himself. That sick man could have marred his recovery to any extent — could, had he so chosen, have quite prevented it and turned his sickness into speedy death. It would have been easy for him to snap the thread when it was so slender. A little negligence would have done it. So let his friends rejoice with and congratulate him, on account of both the happy change itself and the free part he has had in promoting it. And let neither him nor them forget to thank with loud hearts that God whose providence and forces were so indispensable that the sick man would now be a dead man had it not been for them. O gracious convert, just now deadly sick, this convalescent whom all should congratulate, and who should keep high festival of praise to God, is *yourself*.

Lo, God Himself did build the way
To yonder dark pit down,
That I from it might upward come,
To Strait Gate and a crown.

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And then His hand came forth to me,
Like beam from out the sun,
And drew upon my grimy palm
That I His way might run.

Nor once did leave my straying feet,
Nor feet that sunk in mire,
But drew and lifted, as the babe
Is onward helped by sire.

And shod with steel my naked feet
To climb the stony hill,
And waved before a mighty wand
My foes with fears to fill.

Until that hand, that pierced hand,
All red with its own gore,
By helpings such and helpings much
Had flushed my garments o'er;

And brought me to a narrow door,
On which a cross was hung;
Then helped me ply that knocker red,
Till sky with summons rung.

Hark to the sweetly singing gate,
Shot backward to the wall!
"Come in, thou blessed of the Lord!"
Sung shining warders all.

And through the open space before,
Best sight to man e'er given,

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I saw the shining road that leads
  Up to the gate of Heaven.

Within the Gate? now God be thanked
  For that dear grace He gave,
When His own hand shot back the bolt
  That rusted in its grave,

And brought the pilgrim through sunward —
  Now full upon my brow,
Slants down the glory of such morn
  As never broke till now.

Shall nations light their fires of joy,
  And shout with cannon voice,
When they come forth from earthly thrall?
  Then how should I rejoice!

Rejoice I do — rejoice I must;
  Now give me joy to-day;
For never day so fair as this
  Shone forth from my alway.

Oh, spring aloft, ye Shining Ones,
  Who watch for us below,
And tell through all yon flaming choirs
  The gospel that ye know.

Hark, how the silver trumpets shout!
  Hark, how the bells do ring!
How, like a golden deluge, swell
  The psalms around the King!

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"The sinner lost is found again," —
Ah, this the song for me;
And news that sets all Heaven aflame
Is just the news for *thee.*

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